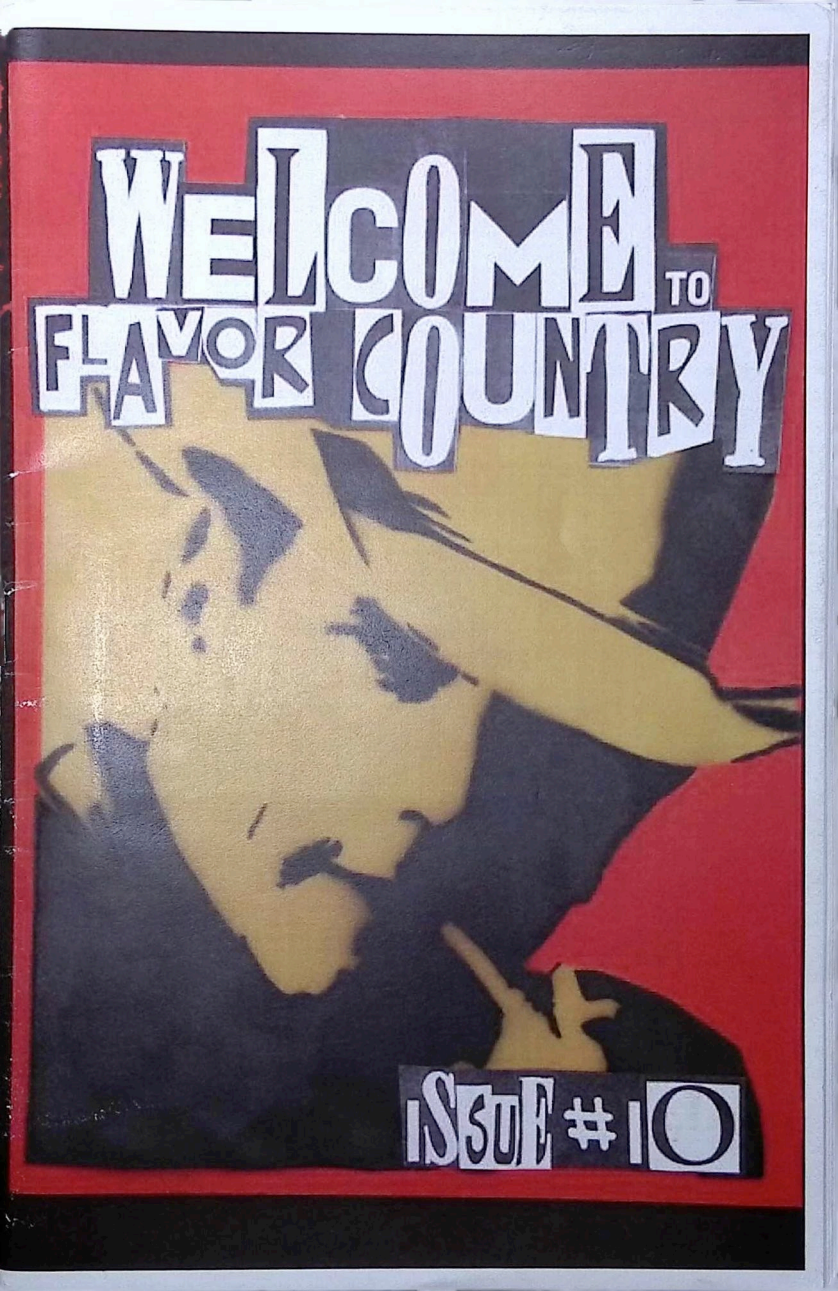
WELCOME TO FLAVOR COUNTRY



ISSUE #10

Better late than never.

2/04/07

Hello.

This is the first issue that was started and completed in Seattle. Needless to say, I'm pretty stoked to be out of Indiana. I've been doing a lot of the writing for this issue in public places, something I never used to do before moving here. I've found a whole new level of inspiration by going to such places as Zoka Coffee (Greenlake) and Top Pot Doughnuts (Capitol Hill). And I may still do a lot of stuff by myself, but at least I have people here I can call if I want. And there's so much to do and I have a good roommate, a nice apartment and a good job. Speaking of work, I found a job working for a contractor in a position for the Environmental Protection Agency. Due to my dislike for most government-related things, this is probably the only part of the government I could see myself ever working for because we're at least working to try and clean up the environment, even if it's in a big, slow manner. And not only did I get this job indexing/helping the public access information about Superfund records, I also got a promotion in the first two months being there. Damn. I expect that's either karma catching up with me or the last good thing that happens to me for the rest of my life. We'll see.

After not having a job for about two and a half months, my sudden insertion into the workforce opened my eyes to a lot of things related to occupations, work and what all of it means. Thus, a number of articles/essays/poems relate to that subject. But there's also many other things including some short stories.

That being said, thanks go to Sara Billups for editing help. Also thanks go to the artists for this issue: Adam MacKinnon did the cover art

Adam: [redacted]otmail.com

Contact me via email: welcometoflavorcountry@gmail.com or at Myspace: www.myspace.com/welcometoflavorcountry

Love,

Kurt

Kurt

What I'm into this time around:

Texas Is The Reason (everything)
Christopher's Assorted Fruit Jellies from Trader Joe's
In The Face Of War's cover of "Everlong" by Foo Fighters
Going Vegetarian
Dead to Fall – The Phoenix Throne

Work

I recently started a new job in my new home of Seattle. I work for a technology contracting company, Booz Allen Hamilton (and yes, I've heard all the jokes about their name). Technically speaking, I am a Jr. Research Analyst. Booz Allen's line of work is strategy and technology consulting. Primarily they deal with the U. S. Government but they also hold private sector contracts as well. The specific contract I'm working on is with the EPA in Region 10 (Oregon, Idaho, Alaska and Washington). I work in the Records Center for Superfund, the government program that handles hazardous waste sites. Our primary job is to ensure that paper and electronic records concerning each site are kept up to date. However, as a technology consultant my job is also to ensure that we find ways that the client (the EPA) can become more efficient and successful in their work. In the end, I spend the majority of my time making sure my people are happy (I am a supervisor over three other folks), working with EPA officials and site managers to get them information they need, data entry, going to meetings, and quelling potential problems. What I like most about the job are the amazing, weird stories we come across that describe how a number of these sites came to existence. There's some crazy shit out there about companies (and all too often, other agencies in the government) that have polluted a town's drinking water or some river or creek. Back in the 40s or 50s perhaps you could excuse it but it's hard to overlook ignorance of that nature any more. So many weird things have occurred which I've read about, including how the US military dropped nuclear bombs underground on some of the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska in the 60s and 70s, the sludge that would burst into flame if it came in contact with air, and multiple communities that have had their health severely damaged thanks to the actions of some ill-behaved company (building a landfill in a ravine? That's a GREAT idea!)
But other aspects of the job are enjoyable, too, including the people I work with and the effort to try and promote technology to the client. On that note, it can be fairly challenging to get people to embrace change and see the benefits of technology. Also, as one might imagine, there can be a lot of politics and you have to learn to be patient with all parties involved. Trust me when I say that all the rumors you've heard about the slowness of the federal government are true. We're using technology there that is easily five if not ten years out of date. And coming from some place like a university where technology is really used to its' full extent, one can see how vast the differences are between universities and the federal government, not to mention the private sector of business.
And yet beyond all the details of what I do on a daily basis, work seems to be a sign of something greater than what we think it is. I look at it and think of how it shows me I'm growing up and getting older. I'm learning to take on more responsibility, too. And of course there is some kind of constant debate in my head about what all this means in regards to my punk rock ethics.
See, my company is fairly corporate (18,000+ employees in 40 countries) and thus carries with it all that entails with the attitude, the "bottom line", turning a profit, etc. Is it acceptable with my DIY ethics to work for

a multinational, multibillion dollar corporation? Unfortunately, as much as I'd like to live a life of utter simplicity and do something I really love, I've learned a few things. One is that I need health insurance. This isn't born out of a paranoid need as much as it is that I have some health issues that require health care. This can really limit what you want to do more than you might believe. I also refuse to wear a suit and tie to any job; by not partaking in that style of dress it's a symbol to me of not being too tied in to the corporate yolk. The day my employer or my position requires a suit and tie is the day I quit. I don't want to wear it and there are plenty of other jobs at which I could possibly work that wouldn't require it. Beyond all of this is that my company is a contractor for government agencies, including the Department of Defense (DoD). These are the folks that kill people as part of our glorious military machine that receives a large portion of our federal budget. It's weird to have people within my company brag about how they were part of a project for Boeing that helped build a new airplane for the military. I wonder what kind of world I'm living in where people are proud of being a part of a project that creates an object that kills human beings. Thankfully my work with the EPA is to HELP people so that makes me feel a little better. While my company is a war profiteer and I have had an ethical debate with myself concerning working for them, I consider the fact that they also work with the Gates Foundation, libraries and the EPA to be a big positive. I don't pretend I'm going to change my corporation, but I do like helping people and I have that opportunity here. Is this rationalizing things? I don't know. In the end I guess I figure that most people's employers do things that aid evil in the world. We all contribute our tax dollars to the war effort, whether we like it or not. General Electric (GE) makes appliances which help make our lives easier in so many ways, but then they also have severely polluted three sites in the U.S. including 200 miles along the Hudson River in New York. Major chemical companies create things we use to wash our hair and brush our teeth and then create chemical poisons that pollute our air and water. Hell, even the aforementioned Gates Foundation is a huge boon to world health and education projects but it grew out of Microsoft which sought to quash any opposition to its' computer operating system. So go figure.

I would ideally like to think that I could work for a record label or book company or some small business that supports the arts. However, after my experience of working with a record label I have to admit that I grew fairly burnt out on the small, indie jobs: the extra hours, the low pay, little to no health insurance – no thanks. I'm not looking to get rich; I just want to be able to pay my rent and bills and not have to have six roommates, too.

In my current job, we have all kinds of training and meetings to go to. One of the great things about this is that a lot of the training is done all over the U.S. and my company will fly me and pay me for my training while they put me up in a nice hotel. I can't really argue with that. It's especially at times like that in which I feel as though I've pulled some kind of huge con job on Booz Allen. It's like, "if only they knew I was just some punk kid – then they wouldn't be treating me this nice." I know my stuff when it comes to consultation in my job (at least I think I do), but

there are so many ways in which I feel as though I should not be getting along with these people at my company. I don't fit in with that whole corporate atmosphere. We're diametrically opposed on so many levels. Does that mean we can't work together? No, not necessarily. I find it interesting how in high school I wouldn't have gotten along with these people at all and then when thrown into the general job market, we all have to get along and let all our old prejudices go. Some of it is maturity I suppose but it's interesting to me nonetheless.

The flip side of my company's occasional pampering, though, is that I occasionally get the corporate pressure to do things: go to happy hours or office parties or this or that. I am glad that my co-workers who I supervise also have little to no interest in that kind of stuff and so we all can kind of stick together on it. We're not interested in networking, in making tons of new friends or anything like that. We want to come in and do a good job and work hard and help our client (the EPA) and go home. We treat each other well, but this idea of jumping up the ladder and becoming a corporate partner at some point is kind of ridiculous to me. I like my job just fine the way it is and I don't really want to have to work with DoD projects or something for the Department of Homeland Security. Besides, in the end, as I told my co-workers, "I'm a librarian, what do they expect?" For those that don't understand that, it translates to: "I'm a librarian; the corporate culture goes against so much of who I am as a part of that profession." And I don't think my bosses get that as they are heavily entrenched in that corporate culture. One of these days I will have to have that "I find about half of what your company does to be morally reprehensible" talk with them. I'm sure I'll find a way to put it a little more tactfully but like most businesses, I'm sure my boss will inevitably ask me, "where do you see yourself in five years?" and I will do my best to not give comedian Mitch Hedberg's answer, "celebrating the fifth- year anniversary of you asking me this question."

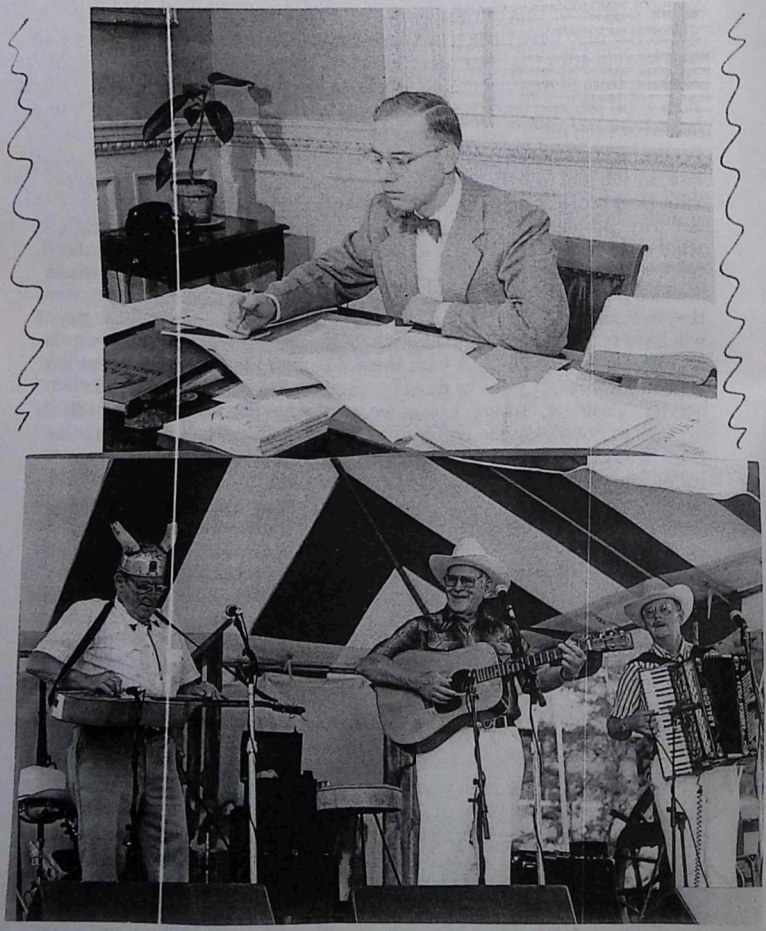
In the end one of the things that I enjoy most is that my job is to help people reach their goals and I like that. And while I'm not a big fan of the federal government (more in regards to the whole manipulating people around the world and killing them) at least I'm working with a part that tries to help people by working with the environment. And I get to use things I learned in grad school so it helps me believe THAT wasn't a huge waste of time. And the money and benefits are helpful, too.

So, like many hippies, punk rockers and liberals before me (not that I'm necessarily all of those things), I'm doing my best to try and make the world a better place while taking advantage of the things about my company that I can in order to try and counter some of the unduly things I might detest.

Surprisingly, I'm not the only one out there with a punk rock background who is trying to make it all work. Whether it is academia (Milo of the Descendents, Greg Graffin of Bad Religion or Dexter Holland of the Offspring) or an office job, chances are there are those around you whose ethics you respect and admire and who never sold out despite their surroundings. Many of us have hobbies outside of work that get us through, others are seriously trying to make an impact in our area of employment while simultaneously exerting our ethics that got us to that

point to begin with. Let's hope that despite the stereotype of punks as drunk anarchists, those around us in our jobs might be able to see some of the progressive views of equality as empowering and life changing as they were for me.

For more information on pollution in your area, do a search at CERCLIS:
http://cfpub.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/srchsites.cfm
Or check out the EPA's website: http://www.epa.gov



Our Parents

Our parents want us to follow in their footsteps
and to be proud of us – to share in their past
so they don't feel alone.
Hoping we will play sports
join their religion
or take up their profession.
We want that connection that may
or may not ever come.
Not many of those parents want that connection built over
short tempers
or selfishness
or pedophilia
or alcoholism.
No one wants to bond over the negatives.
Not many parents patiently guide their elementary aged children
into tasting different vodkas
or carefully instruct them on how to belittle folks
from their early childhood years.
Few can be found
sitting there, instructing a child
from a book entitled "Pedophilia For Dummies"
practicing on dolls –
Daddy is SO PROUD OF YOU!
No, the disappointment is there
when we leave their tight circle of control.
What did you expect?

Sabotaging a Living

A few of the things I've written about in this issue have to deal with work. As I mentioned, I started a new job a few months ago and have been thinking a lot about the concept of work, why we work and how our jobs affect others. Moreover, how does work affect our society and our relationships? A couple things that I've read and seen in the past few months have really helped me understand some things about our relationship with work. The first was reading a book called Sabotage, which was stories of ways in which employees have sabotaged their work. The act of sabotage was defined as doing anything at work you weren't supposed to do. This could range anywhere from sleeping on the job to stealing supplies or purposely fucking up projects. The stories showed how this is done in many lines of work, from computer programming to garbage men. It made for a really interesting read and while it seemed as though some of the people crossed a moral line, I had to admit that I, too, have been guilty of sabotage. I've stolen things from work, spent a lot of my time online instead of working, talked to co-workers for hours on end about non-work related things and misreported my worked hours on my time card. We've all done our own bit of sabotage.

What this book helped remind me is that people don't like their jobs – it's not just me. All over the United States, in every kind of line of work, people dislike what they do. Not all of us dislike our occupations, but I would say that most of us would rather be doing something else. Occasionally people actually like their jobs, they just don't like their co-workers or supervisors. Other times the jobs just suck and the compensation isn't worth it. Sabotage helped me realize I'm not alone, though. The things I learned from this are that people are always going to find things they dislike about their work, education is helpful but not essential in trying to find a job you do enjoy, and often times individuals aren't being compensated properly for the work they do, especially at the lower levels.

This leads in to the other thing that really helped me understand work and that is the documentary *Waging A Living*. I got it through Netflix but I believe it originally aired on the POV program on PBS. It takes the viewer through the life of four people trying to survive on minimum wage (or close to it) and throughout its' course goes to show how impossible it is to get people to live a real life on so paltry a salary. All of these individuals, from various backgrounds, races and parts of the country all worked hard, but due to various circumstances they had the hardest time trying to make ends meet.

It was promising to see some of them succeed at little things but despite their best intentions, not all of them could become rich and famous; hell, most of them couldn't even afford their rent in a shitty apartment or food for themselves or their families. Meanwhile, brokers at investment firms get multi-million dollar bonuses. Of course, the question remains as to whether the wealthy deserve so much for working hard when others work hard as well, but only make six dollars an hour. Is the fact that many of these people went to many years of school mean they should receive millions more a year? These are questions which certainly should be debated.

From another perspective, it's helpful to see the history of the labor movement and how workers didn't always have a right to a 40 hour work week and eight hour work days. The concept of the weekend is kind of new in the big scheme of things and we have a bunch of low-wage poor people to thank for it. Check into Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States" or any of Zinn's other work on labor history. Some

might think that Zinn gives it too much attention, but on a certain level I believe that people play up certain holidays and forget about the importance of holidays like Labor Day and May Day, wherein we remember our forefathers who gave us something we deal with almost every day: work. Can you imagine working your shitty office or mall job or working outdoors for someone for 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week? It seems so outrageous but because of a number of folks who worked their asses off before us we now don't have to worry about punching the timecard to make a 70 or 80 hour work week. While some may disagree with me, in light of the pointlessness of most of America's wars, something like Labor Day means a whole lot more to me on a daily basis than an occasion such as Memorial or Veterans Day ever could.

Yet today we find ourselves still struggling with many of the same problems fundamentally ingrained into our system of life: the poor being trampled upon and forgotten while the rich get richer and more secure in their high positions. There are still many strides to be made in regards to raising the wage of workers not just to a minimum wage but to a livable wage. It would also be helpful to open lines of communication in our workplaces and at its' root to find employers who are open to the idea of treating their employees the way they would like to be treated were situations reversed. Obviously many businesses have found a way to make that work for them (Costco, In-N-Out Burgers, many smaller businesses), but there are still a plethora of those who could do better. Often times it seems as though people start businesses and think it's all about their product instead of realizing that yes, it's about that, but the employees are dedicating their time and lives to making that product and deserve to be considered in a great many more ways than they are at many places.

I may bitch about my job, but I know that in the end I have a good education and could be doing much worse. We all have to stick up for ourselves at our work and see that we're being treated fairly. No one is going to do it for us and seeing as to the time we're spending at one place each week, we deserve a bit more than just a minimum wage or unhealthy working conditions – physically, mentally or emotionally. Call it a pipe dream if you want, but to me it's my life and I'd rather that we all do what we can to enjoy our work than loathe it.

Herman Melville Wrote More Books Than Just *Moby Dick*

It's not so much that I'm burnt out, he thinks to himself, I just don't know what else I've got. He spends thirty minutes working on a large cup of coffee and four cigarettes, taking his time with each. His eyes stare blankly straight ahead and he can't imagine much else beyond the thoughts that overtake his mind. It's like a laundry list of continual problems. Does anyone ever notice? He doesn't even remember that he forgot to comb his hair this morning. And it's been at least two days since he's shaved. These things that make up the routine get tossed to the wayside in light of more important issues. He lights another cigarette, sips on the cup of coffee. He is constantly leaning forward. Not poised so much for anything but moreso he's just uncomfortable leaning back. The people walking by on the sidewalk see the display of chair and tables outside and the individuals arranged at each. In the split second judgments they make of each person as they pass by, the unspoken consensus is that he is slightly mentally retarded OR burnt out on drugs. And for what it's worth, the truth is that he is coming down from a high, brought on by substances he can't remember, his choice of drugs not really relegated to any one thing.

Or maybe he is mentally retarded and this is the high point of his day. The colors and tastes and people represent the only time in his day he can get away from the boring drabness of his apartment. His IQ is lower than normal and all he can do is work a minor office job, but he still dresses nicely in khakis and a polo shirt and with a pullover fleece. He wants to look good, lest anyone think he's not professional or so his life coach told him. His life coach has been reading a lot of books lately. He told him about this one called Moby Dick.

Or maybe that was the name of a drug he was sold last night. They all have so many weird names anymore.

When women cross his path while he sits there he will break his concentration on nothing and follow them with his eyes. And yet he barely moves. He likes women. A lot. But he's not sure how to meet them or even what to say to them. The faucet spigot protruding from the building keeps his attention for quite some time. In his sub-normal mind he can't quite figure out how it works. Gears, he figures. Gears and knobs. He needs help. It's not an immediate want, but in time he'll need something from someone to keep himself going. He doesn't know how to find the help he needs. His mind circles back on itself. His hand feels jittery. He takes another drag from his cigarette; another sip from his coffee. He doesn't like this neighborhood.

Rising, he enters the shop, throws away some trash from his pocket and walks back out the door. An overly cheerful barista wishes him a good day; he says nothing in return. He walks out and to the right, opposite of the way he came from home. The man doesn't know where he's going. All he can do is think in short, muted tones. Leaf. Concrete. Grey. Tree. House. Car.

He has no friends and no pets to go home to. Everyone seemingly uses him for their own means. Most days he doesn't even notice. To those sitting at the chairs at the coffeeshop, the man disappears down the street, his final destination obscured by the clutter of urban progress mixed with what's left of nature.

Dear Bloomington,

Hi. How are you? I know it's been a while since we last spoke but I wanted to write and see how you were doing. I'd like to think that we parted on good terms but I know that things are never what they seem and I tend to think that relationships end better than the other party thinks they do. I wanted to write, though, and let you know that I'm sorry if I did anything to hurt you. I also wanted to apologize because I'm sure at the time I could have done something more to make things work between us. I could've gone out more, and been more social. I could've tried harder not to distance myself from you and to a large degree I should have integrated myself with you and your community more. I am sure you are willing to accept me and others' faults wholeheartedly and that's one of the many things I appreciate about you.

In the fall there was a certain feeling that permeated much of our relationship. You were comfortable to be around. You were safe in the midst of all that was changing around us. And you were beautiful. Every street found me more in awe of the originality of your loveliness. You were capable of so many things and I felt as though I was hardly able to match them or keep up. You were intimate in your personality and knew how to keep my attention. You drew others to you as well, inspiring and encouraging artists and seekers of truth as well as any of us who wanted a better life with a sense of community and belonging.

I feel like I didn't give you a fair shake. And even though I am now living on the other side of the country, there is something inside of me that wants to come back and see you again. I think sometime in the future, after we've had our time apart from one another I'd like to have another chance to make things work between us. Maybe when I'm older and ready to settle down in a smaller place and be around people in a more intimate situation. Perhaps when I've matured and know what direction I want to go I will come back and find you. And learn to appreciate your beauty and not just hole up in my residence and shy away from doing things with people. I will pick up photography again and perhaps work on another degree or teach or something of that sort. We will get along fantastically and hug and dance and share one another's company to our fullest extent.

I live my life generally feeling some softened sense of regret when I see who I am now and how I am capable of doing certain things now that I was never able to before. But I always move on, realizing there is little else I can do. And yet I am able to know a good thing when I see it and I realize the strengths that exist with you and I want to return and see if we could really work again. I don't feel horribly jilted when I think of you, I just know that I could've done things better and more importantly, that I'm in a better spot now that I have matured a little bit and have gotten past many of my former pitfalls.

But we all must move on and what comes will come. I just wanted to thank you for who you were, are and continue to be: a haven for those feeling awkward in an otherwise straight-laced state, an artistic enclave, a progressive small city and so much more. The days the sun shone on you were the best days I knew.

Love,
kurt.

pg. 12

I found these at work by the fax machine

Haikus for the Workplace

A file that big?
It might be very useful
But now it is gone.

Yesterday it worked
Today it is not working
Windows is like that.

First snow, then silence.
This thousand-dollar screen dies
So beautifully.

The Tao that is seen
Is not the true Tao, until
You bring fresh toner.

Windows NT crashed.
I am the Blue Screen of Death.
No one hears your screams.

Three things are certain:
Death, taxes, and lost data.
Guess which has occurred.

The Web Site you seek
Cannot be located, but
Endless others exist.

Out of Memory.
We wish to hold the whole sky,
But we never will.

Having been erased,
The document you're seeking
Must now be retyped.

Serious error.
All shortcuts have disappeared.
Screen. Mind. Both are blank.

Hey I Miss You

Part 1

"You know, there is seriously a good chance I may never fall in love," Jim says to his friend Paul looking up from his writing.

Paul, a scrawny college senior with black messy hair slightly hanging in front of his eyes and sporting a yellow Bad Brains t-shirt with the band's ROIR tape cover on the front, glances up from his book while still trying to finish the sentence he's reading. He mumbles a "Hmm?" only half paying attention.

"I said there is seriously a good chance I may never fall in love," Jim, repeats himself, this time more firmly. Jim is the nerdier counterpart to Paul, with wire-rimmed glasses, short brown hair and wearing a button-up collared shirt. While not masking his interest in all things computer-related it does belie his more non-mainstream music tastes which range from Mr. Bungle to James Brown and old Green Day.

"I'd rather doubt that," Paul says skeptically. A few seconds of silence pass before Paul adds, "Wait, you've never been in love before?"

"Uh, no," Jim says hesitantly.

"Wow."

"Why, have you?"

"Yeah, a couple times. Don't worry though. It comes easier to some of us than others. Besides, it's not all it's cracked up to be."

"Why do you say that?" Jim asks. "Did you have a bad experience with it?" Jim finally puts down his pen on his notebook. Sensing that this is leading to a deeper conversation, Paul loosely places the bookmark in his book and lays it face down on their table at the coffeehouse.

"I wouldn't say either experience was bad, per se, it's just that love is a very intense emotion and often times it will turn you into someone you're not. Later on, months or years down the line you wonder why you did what you did or said what you said."

"Yeah, I've heard all that before," Jim responds. "I was hoping you'd have some other insights beyond that."

Paul laughs a quick "ha" and then says, "Afraid not man. What makes you think you'll never fall in love anyway?"

"I dunno. I'm just not feeling the possibilities I guess. It seems like my life is all such a routine: school, work, sleep. It's hard to imagine anything else."

"Yeah, I hear ya," Paul says, blowing on his still steaming cup of coffee.

"Does that really help at all?" Jim inquires, motioning to Paul's hand with the cup of coffee in it.

"What?" Paul asks, looking at his hand holding the piping hot cup of java. "Oh. Uh, I dunno." Paul takes a sip and the warm liquid burns his tongue. "Ahh – still too hot," he quips, rubbing his tongue around his mouth.

"So what are you reading, anyway?" Jim asks, pointing to the book lying face down in front of Paul.

"Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn."

"Any good?"

"I have no idea. I literally just started reading it."

"What class is it for?"

"Modern Russian History. Solzhenitsyn was a political prisoner in the '40s and '50s in the Soviet Union. He also had internal exile imposed on him."

"What's that?"

"Well, according to my professor's definition today in class," Paul thinks for a second, "it's 'the detention of people in specific places by force.' It's within the person's own country, but usually out in the middle of nowhere."

"Ha. If that was a condition of the mind, I think it would be vaguely synonymous with love," Jim quips, laughing. "Back to the topic of love, do you mind if I ask what happened with the two relationships when you were in love?"

"No, it's cool. The most recent time was just last year with Maria. You remember her, right?"

"Yeah, totally," Jim replies, recalling the girl a year ahead of them in college with the choppy brown hair and piercings in her nose, ears and lip. The seminal indie rocker minus the elitist attitude. She broke up with Paul after graduating and moving way. The two of them had been going out for a couple of years. It didn't come as much of a surprise to either one of them when it happened, but it certainly didn't make it any easier on Paul. He spent a good three days in his bedroom, coming out only to use the bathroom and to get the occasional glass of water. Jim was finally able to coax him out to go to a house party where Paul promptly got incredibly blitzed, fucked some girl he didn't know and puked all over someone's bed. It was one hell of a rebound.

"So yeah," Paul responded, flickering through all his memories of a two year relationship in the course of five seconds, "you know that situation. The other time I was in love was before Maria – it was a very strange experience to say the least." Paul leans back in his chair and exhales, staring blankly at the book in front of him. Nervously, Jim chimes in, "Hey man, if you don't want to talk about it that's ok."

"No, no. It's cool. I just haven't talked about it much – hell, I haven't thought about it in forever. It almost seems like another life," his voice trails and for a split second he's somewhere else. Paul wipes his hand over his face trying to clear his thoughts. Suddenly he asks Jim, "Do you remember the band I was in a few years ago?"

Ah, how could Jim forget Ache? Named after a Jawbreaker song, they were the toast of the indie scene in their college town for their two-year existence. Culminating in a couple of regional tours, an EP and an album, Ache was a good mix of punk and indie rock. Their live show was always a good time, usually degenerating into a full-on party with at least one band member drunk. What else could you expect from a band full of college students?

"Paul, I was at half your shows dude. Of course I remember."

"Oh yeah. I guess that just seems like so long ago I haven't thought about most of it in a while."

"That's too bad. You guys were good."

"Thanks, Jim. Anywho, I was the guy in the band answering most of the email from our website and so I'd get the occasional email from some fan from somewhere in California or Texas who heard our stuff either online or some other way. They'd write and I'd write back just to be nice and answer any questions they might've asked.

"Anyway, one day my freshman year I get this email from a girl in New York City. She's a student at Columbia and seemed sincere and friendly and after the initial email we kept writing, talking about our lives, schools, what inspired us and so on. Well, this went on for a few months and before I know it we're talking on the phone a few times a week and sometimes for like four or five hours at a time. How I kept from failing my classes is beyond me.

"The girl's name was Alex and she was a junior and lived in an apartment with a few roommates in Manhattan near the campus. And as weird as it may seem for people to meet over the internet, that's totally what was happening. We were getting to know each other better and she really liked the songs I was writing and I liked that she was older and bookish. And you know how it is meeting someone over the internet." Paul quipped, knowing his friend had made quite a few friends in the online gaming community.

"You can really get to know them to some degree but usually only what they want you to know. So after months of phone calls and emails and us opening up to one another and eventually sharing our feelings for one another, she told me I

should come visit her in the spring since we both had the same spring break.

"So I bought my plane ticket and when spring break came I flew in to JFK and took a cab to her place. Here I was, nineteen, by myself in New York, and about to meet some girl I had primarily communicated with over the internet and spend four days with her."

"Had you ever been to New York before?" Jim asked.

"Yeah, once with my family when I was about ten," Paul replied.

"Okay. So is this the part where you tell me Alex was really a 48 year old man who weighed 300 pounds?" Jim questioned, laughing.

Paul smiled. "Hardly. Of course we had traded pictures beforehand. She looked pretty much like she did in her pictures: maybe 5'2" or 5'3", short black hair, black eyes, just incredibly cute. I finally got to her apartment and she buzzed me up, I lugged my bag up the stairs and knocked on her door and there she was, finally before me. She gave me this big hug and squealed out, 'Paul! It's so good to see you!' I hesitated for a moment and then returned her embrace. And it was right at that point that I thought to myself, 'You know what? I'm gonna treat this just like anything else. I'm not going to make this weird. I'm just going to pretend this is like a normal relationship.'

"And so there we were. She introduced me to her roommates and then I was all ready to crash out on the couch since it was late and I was tired from being in airports all day. But as I threw my stuff down on the couch she just looked at me and said, 'What are you doing?' I told her I was pretty tired and was going to crash on the couch. 'Oh no,' she said to me in a really coy voice, 'you're sleeping with me tonight.' I swear dude, my penis went from half mast to full-on raging boner like that," Paul said, snapping his fingers.

Jim laughed. "Nice. You're one lucky guy."

"Oh, just you wait," Paul replied with a half-tortured smile. "This story only gets more fun from here on out."

Part 2

"So, did I mention she was playing for both teams?" Paul asks with that look on his face that only comes when one controls the release of events in a story, dropping them at the most opportune time.

"What?!" Jim said rather loudly, drawing a few stares from nearby coffee patrons.

"Ohhh yeah," Paul says with yet another sigh. "She went for girls, too. I guess her interest in me was an exception."

"Wait a second," Jim interrupts, "does that mean she and her roommates were – "

"Ha ha. No, no, no. Just friends," Paul quickly pipes in.

"Okay, just wondering. Go ahead."

"So where was I? Oh yeah. So we get to bed that night acting like we were all mature and weren't going to do anything weird and really we didn't, but when I woke up in the morning she was totally spooning me. I snuck out of bed and went to the bathroom, then went and lie on the couch for a while and read. Eventually Alex woke up, cute as could be.

"I won't give you every last detail because honestly most of the trip was just us wondering around the city. We went to Brooklyn, the Bronx, did some touristy stuff and ate out at a bunch of restaurants. Being that it was spring break the weather was kind of sketchy some days but it wasn't too bad. The second night she wanted to go see these bands play at some bar in Brooklyn so we went out there and snuck me in with my fake ID. I felt even more nervous than I probably should have been and could only think of that episode of Simpsons where Bart becomes a courier and the guy running the courier business says to Bart, 'Well, you don't look 25, but your out-of-state un-laminated ID is proof enough for me.'

"Thankfully I got through ok, but decided not to drink too much. Alex on the other hand, being a waif got fairly tipsy after a few drinks. It wasn't really until the end of the night I noticed it. But she was exceptionally giddy and very flirtatious. After the show she held my hand as we made our way to the subway. On the train she put her head on my shoulder and dozed off. Her breath smelled like beer but not in an annoying way. It was actually kind of cute and she just felt right, you know? I think that by that time, given all the buildup beforehand and what a phenomenally fun time I had had with her I was beginning to really feel like I was in love.

"I hate to sound like a teacher here, but let me tell you a couple of things I've learned about love, Jim. It'll help my experience make a little more sense to you."

"Ok, cool. Please proceed," Jim says sarcastically, extending his upraised right hand towards Paul, the signal that says, "You have the floor."

"Okay, so one thing I've learned is that you have very little say over when you'll fall in love. Granted, you won't fall in love with someone you hate or aren't attracted to in some way, but most of the time it seems you can just be minding your own business in life and then love just happens. Another thing I've learned is that love isn't prejudice. As long as you're the slightest

bit open to someone being in your life and you're slightly vulnerable with them, it can happen. I mean, it wasn't really my ideal situation to fall in love with someone who lived hundreds of miles away and who normally found girls more attractive than boys. But it just happens and you go with it. The last thing about love is that when you're in love, all those stupid pop ballads make total sense to you. Disney-era Phil Collins, Celine Dion, Rod Stewart: all freaking geniuses my friend. It's pretty sad, actually."

Jim laughed. "I guess that figures, though. They'd have to appeal to *somebody*. All of what you said seems to make some sense to me I guess."

"Good. So that night as we got off the train and made our way back to her place she got really close to me and while we were waiting to cross the street she looked at me and said, 'I'm gonna take a shower when we get home.' 'Alright,' I replied, looking away from her and at the crosswalk sign. 'Do you want to take it with me?' she asked with a big smile on her face. The crosswalk suddenly said walk but I was just standing there with my mouth hanging open. She started walking and I couldn't move – I was fairly stunned. I mean Jim, come on, you know me – I'm not some naïve dude, but I'm definitely not a player, so when a girl tells me she wants to shower with me, it catches me a bit off guard. I mean, I guess when I flew out there I thought we'd do stuff but figured it more along the lines of making out a bit. Showering together always seemed at the time to me to be something that married couples only did together. I'd fooled around with girls before, but never something so intimate. Shit, maybe I *was* slightly naïve. I dunno." Paul said that last part and trailed off, once again going someplace else in his mind.

"Dude, it's cool," Jim said, "I understand. No need to justify things to me."

"Ok, well, anyway, seeing as to how she was slightly tipsy and all I didn't feel quite right about it. So I told her, "Alex, that's okay. I appreciate the offer but I think I'm just going to go to bed.' She smiled and said, 'Okay, your loss.' Having dodged that bullet in the loss of my innocence I got ready for bed while she took a shower. She came back to her bedroom dressed only in her towel and I was about half asleep. She said my name to see if I was sleeping. All my half-awake mind could muster was a mumble. 'Can we cuddle?' she asked me. Fuuuck. As though I'm *that* naïve. 'Sure Alex,' I told her, suddenly waking a bit and sitting up. She had changed into some flannel boxer shorts and a t-shirt and hopped under the covers with me. 'Like my shirt?' she asked. 'Oh you've got to be kidding me,' I said. And there she was wearing an Ache t-shirt."

"Which one?" Jim, always the consummate band nerd asked.

"It was the one with the Greek warrior on it."

"Cool. I like that one."

"Yeah, so next thing I know we're making out and cuddling and I'm pretty sure it was only our fatigue that kept us from having sex.

"The next day we went back over to Brooklyn 'cause I wanted to go to this bookstore over there. We had a really good time and I had this ridiculously good PBJ and banana sandwich before we went to another show of some local bands, this time at the Northsix. It's one of the indie venues in Brooklyn. After the show we walked down the block towards the water. From the front steps of some boarded business we found the best view of the Manhattan skyline. It's fucking gorgeous and we're standing there just watching the city, not talking, and I put my arms around her. Dude, it was totally like something from the movies. So perfect.

"It was fairly late by this time, so we headed back and experienced one of those totally typical things that can only happen in New York. The subway was kinda crowded, so when we saw two open seats we thought we were in luck. Then we noticed the huge pile of puke lying right in front of the seats, narrowly avoiding a very gross finale to our evening. As we stood there, it suddenly became our job to warn people at every stop about the puke. Unfortunately some couple didn't heed our warning. While it sucks to step in puke, seeing the reaction on people's faces is hilarious. So after that we quit warning them.

"When we got back to her place we were in a good mood and we started to watch a movie and we snuggled and all of that kind of thing. Finally things got kind of heated and we ended up going pretty far but stopped short of having sex."

"Why?" Jim asked.

"You know, I really have no clue. Don't get me wrong, what we did was great, but I guess things just weren't right. Eventually we fell asleep."

Part 3

"So how did you feel about what happened the next day?" asked Jim.

"I dunno. I guess I started doubting myself to some degree. Not because we didn't have sex but because it all seemed so surreal. It was like a fucking movie. So the next day the weather was shitty and we just lay around in bed being lazy and listening to records. At one point that day we were listening to this Sigur Ros album and for some reason the music and my emotions and the

weather all got to me and I just started bawling. And Alex was like, 'What's wrong?' and I said through my crying that I didn't know. I guess I was feeling everything from the past few days so much that it just got me to crack. I had never felt so strongly about anyone before.

"She was really great about everything and held me and helped me feel better. But in the end Jim, I was still just 19. I really had no clue what I was doing and having not had a real serious relationship before this I guess I didn't know how to handle myself.

"The next day or so we still had a good time and fooled around but we never ended up having sex. And I can't help but think that as much as I had tried to treat this as a normal relationship, I had either built it up a ton in my mind beforehand or just wasn't mature enough to handle a connection like that. You know, being so abstract in the form of the relationship and then suddenly being with that person coalesces into something fast, intense and totally romantic. In other words, much the opposite of what I had with Maria."

Jim laughed, knowing all too well how that relationship had been and how different it was than the one in the story in which his friend was telling. Jim recalled things with Maria had happened slowly and were always quite casual between her and Paul.

"So what happened at the end?" Jim asked.

"Well, I got on my flight after a very tough goodbye and then I didn't hear from her for quite a while. I mean, we had the token 'How are you?' emails but nothing where we talked about what happened or concerning that intense connection we made. And then the letters and emails stopped completely.

"What? Why?" Jim questioned, surprised.

"Well, I found that out about three or four months later. Around the time of my birthday I received this letter in an envelope made of a map of the New York City subway system. I seriously about started to cry. I figured she had some problem and had given up on me. I'm not the type of person to stalk someone so after sending her a few emails letting her know I was still there and wondering – sincerely I might add – how she was doing I just gave up. You can't force someone to be friends with you.

"When I got this letter it was like being roped back in to all of those emotions and all that shit. It took me a while but finally I opened the envelope and read the letter. The whole thing was basically about how she was sorry but she had needed time to sort things out; to figure out what had happened and what we were. It was so sweet and romantic and it was just like old times. She even wished me a happy birthday. So after giving it a day or so, I wrote

her an email telling her thanks and how sweet her letter was. We even talked on the phone a few times. But like Morrissey sings, 'It just wasn't like those old days anymore.' Something in us had snapped and we weren't the two people we thought we were going to be together."

Paul starts to pack up his stuff, putting his Solzhenitsyn book in his bag and wiping up spilled coffee with a napkin.

"Hey, I just noticed the time. I've got class in half an hour," Paul tells Jim.

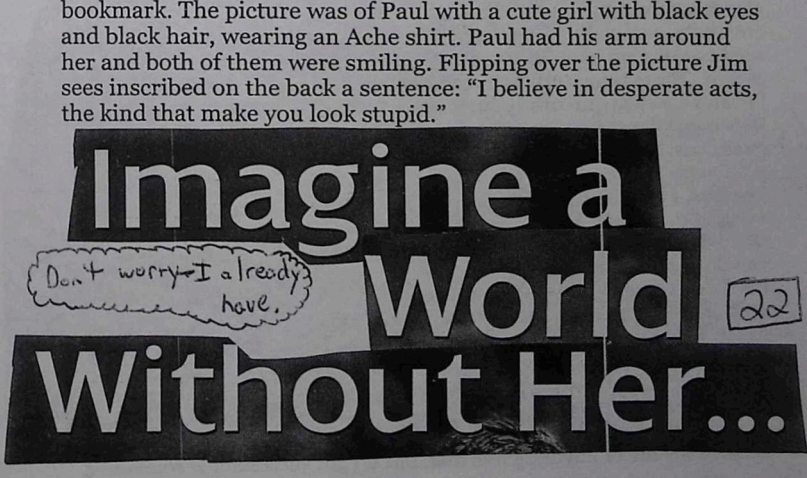
"Well wait, what happened with you and Alex?" Jim asks, somewhat desperately. "You can't leave me hanging like that!"

Paul gets up and puts his cup, spoon and saucer away in the tub by the front counter. The one right next to the sign which says "Thanks for lending a hand!" and it has the picture of the puppy with a front paw raised, like it's trying to shake with the invisible man. Paul swings back by the table, grabs his backpack and says to Jim, "Alex and me?"

"Yeah man, what happened?" Jim emphatically asks.

"After a few months of irregular contact I never heard from her again," Paul says. "Besides, like I said, until today it's not like I had even really thought much about her." He shrugs and then heads out the door of the coffeehouse into the brisk autumn chill.

Disappointed, Jim looks back down at his writing and catches the sight of a small rectangular piece of paper lying on the floor by the chair where Paul was sitting. It looked about the same size as the bookmark Paul had been using and figuring it must've slipped out of the book Jim picked it up and looked at it. Staring at it he sees it's not a piece of paper, but a photo, cut down to make a bookmark. The picture was of Paul with a cute girl with black eyes and black hair, wearing an Ache shirt. Paul had his arm around her and both of them were smiling. Flipping over the picture Jim sees inscribed on the back a sentence: "I believe in desperate acts, the kind that make you look stupid."



Live to work/work to live
OR Why are we living?

It's time to start asking the questions again. I asked her some of them. Instead of answering, she responded, "You tend to over-examine things too much." Duh. That's who I am. I don't know much of anyway else to live. While I have more in-depth times of questioning in my life, there is almost a constant ache of deliberation within my mind. I need answers to questions about reason and being. I know that the answers I get will never suffice. I am a struggle, personified. I cannot rest. Set me on high, bring me back to a mid-level setting and then blast me full-on again. I cannot stop.

That being said, I'm sorry if you don't like to question things or to read about people who do. I cannot help myself. This is part of my personality: to be curious and search for the truth of the meaning of life. Why else are we here? I know it won't be solved. I'm ok with that, but I want to dance with the fire and in-turn realize that the dance is what counts, not living a life away from the fire because you're scared of it and what it might expose/draw to the light.

So in light of my life, I'm curious what I'm supposed to be doing here. My interests here are few and the ones that exist aren't real deep. I don't know what I'm doing or where I want to go. I'm sure that when my parents were my age they really didn't know either but responsibility (marriage, kids) forced them into certain roles. I don't have that responsibility so my mind starts to wander. Where am I going? What do I want to do with my life? Should there even be just one thing to focus upon? Or should life just be lived? I'm definitely in the midst of some very existential moments here but these questions are all I've got. I don't do drugs or drink, I don't play video games in my free time. I read and watch movies. Why? For the most part I watch movies to escape. But I also learn from them (documentaries mainly) and can appreciate their creativity, especially when they make you think. As for books, I usually read non-fiction in order to educate myself. Fiction is another nice way to escape. These things can and often do cause me to think even more about life and cause me to turn inward. All of this reflection will often cause me to become depressed when I realize I have no answers for any of these questions. I feel alone in much of my thoughts and definitely grapple with many of the existential questions of life.

The best I can figure, life is a lot as described in the book of Ecclesiastes: we get 60, 70 years and that's it, so make the best of it. The problem is that while I agree with that I can't help but constantly question what I can do to make the best of it. I know helping other people is part of that, but I don't always know how to accomplish it. And I can't say that I find anything so interesting and fulfilling that I really would want to stick around here on earth. I guess in other words, I don't have a whole lot to live for, except knowing I'd disappoint and sadden a bunch of people if I killed myself. But staying alive for other people is a pretty shitty reason. I just don't know why the average person lives life OR I don't know why I can't just sit back and enjoy what I am doing. I don't really want work to become my life or anything like that, but if I got successful at something

like my zine or something with music it might happen. Is that why people live? For their work? Perhaps people live to love? To make others' happy? I guess most folks never think about it. They just live life, party with friends, enjoy their weekends with friends and family and look forward to their vacations. I feel as though my life has been so amped up that everything smacks of an abstract vague insipidness that causes all other experiences to seem tame. Nothing comes close to what I've felt in my past. Like a drug addict, I give up the powder, the pipe, the needle and go back to this life – your life – and live it like everyone has asked I do – because I was hurting too many people – but in turn realize that everything seems tame and monotonous. I think that perhaps I need to just find an extreme sport or hobby and start engaging in that. Writing doesn't really lend itself to that. But maybe if I started collecting shit and learning all about some sub-genre then it would take up more of my time and I'd feel better because I wouldn't have to think about my life all the time. I'd be living it. It's just a matter of finding that thing.

Monde
COFFEE STAND
AMERICA'S OLDEST CITY MARKET
FRENCH MARKET
NEW ORLEANS
Café
ORIGINAL

(25)

Jesus Camp

When things start coming together in your life, it can lead to a peace and calm that allows you to go about reflecting on your own existence. And so I've settled down here and started to think more on whom I was and how my personality affected who I am now. It's with this state of mind that I went to see the film *Jesus Camp*, a documentary about a charismatic fundamentalist Bible camp set in Devil's Lake (yes, I see the irony), North Dakota. The camp is run by Becky Fischer, a woman with a strong personality who has a set of beliefs which she holds to quite strongly. Three kids, ages 9-12 are also covered in this film. They are Levi, whose deep faith and belief can only be slightly matched by his amazing rat-tail which is in the process of morphing into a mullet; Tori, whose dance skills are used to glorify God, lest she do anything as heinous as dance for the flesh; and finally there is Rachael, whose zeal to convert strangers is somewhere between naively funny and downright disturbing.

As these kids go through the course of the camp (which lasts a week) and their experience afterwards in using what they've learned, the dissenting opinion is offered from the radio booth by Mike Papantonio, host of Air America's "Ring of Fire". A self-proclaimed Christian of the non-evangelical variety, Papantonio at one point even has a lively but not too out of hand debate on air with Becky Fischer.

There are quite a few nuances here in which to delve, but suffice it to say that those unfamiliar with charismatic fundamentalism may find themselves going from thinking this is hilarious to being slightly disturbed within the first 30 minutes. Those who consider themselves evangelicals will be annoyed that the directors seem to paint all evangelical Christians with the same brush. The directors have explained in interviews that they were just out to make a documentary of how children can have such strong religious faith (an idea inspired by a boy from their previous film, the solid documentary, *Boys of Baraka*).

Some might wonder why I'm writing a film review here. The reason is quite simple: besides being one of the top films I've seen this year, this film reminds me very much of how I was raised or at least a number of my church experiences. While I didn't find any of my church happenings to be quite along the lines of the most extreme in the film, certain elements definitely were representative of things I underwent. The emotional manipulation, the fear, the vague threats of Satan punishing you (who needs the Bogeyman?) – these were all in the film. While it was funny to see some of that and laugh at it, after a time it just got depressing and made me feel bad for the kids. To have a ten year old say that he accepted Jesus as his savior at the age of five because he "just felt empty" is not only ridiculous, it's also slightly scary. What has been taught to that kid that he thought his life was empty at age five? Moreover, who taught him to speak with those kinds of phrases? Much of the film goes beyond children's faith and delves more into indoctrination; something which Ms. Fischer has no problem coming out and saying is what they do at her camp.

Seeing a film such as this makes me wonder how much of what I believe is indoctrination and how much of it is my own set of beliefs. In a country where religion plays such a key role, how free can any of us ever be from its' influences? I see many things in the movie that remind me of things that I was taught by youth pastors and Sunday school teachers. "Watch out for Satan!" "Abortion is wrong!" "God's going to raise you up to be a great person!"

There's so much pressure as a child: get your homework done, be involved in certain activities, be like those around you – is it imperative that children really feel as though they need to have the literal fear of God put in them? If you're a fairly nervous or high-strung child, this sort of push to accept a certain religious lifestyle will usually meet with success as children whose families are involved with churches will want to fit in amongst their family and church peers. Granted, there are always exceptions but a certain amount of peer pressure definitely keeps kids going to church. Kids like those in the film. And kids like me. But what do those kids end up really believing? Do they take in the bigotry, closed-mindedness and lack of appreciation of higher education that seems so stereotypical of many charismatic fundamentalists (and even many mainstream evangelicals for that matter)? Or is there a unique personality located somewhere beneath? Left to their own devices outside the scope of religion, who would that child become?

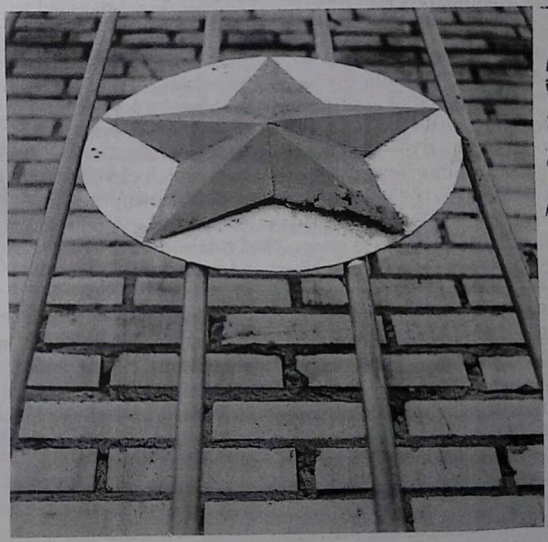
I wonder that about how all this applies to myself, too. I guess in the end it doesn't matter. I am who I am. I still believe in some of the things I was raised to believe and other things I've let go of. I think the influx of punk rock and its' philosophies in my life have helped me put my evangelical upbringing in perspective. It should come as no surprise to anyone reading this that amongst my favorite types of books to read are those concerning Religious History and Sociology and the mixing of the two. I still believe in God, but it sure isn't the same God I believed in when I was thirteen. I don't believe that the Bible should be taken literally and I don't believe in creationism anymore than I believe in evolution. And with a lot of things there's just shit about which I don't care. And I'm sure in another fourteen years my opinions on many of these things will have changed even more.

My point in all of this is that children and pre-teens aren't finished growing and that includes mentally and emotionally. Allowing your child to explore possibilities seems a lot more sensitive than indoctrination one way or the other. No five or ten-yea-old should ever come off a zealot – no matter what their religion. In the end, I can't help but think that if there is a God, he would appreciate our love for him to be given freely and not announced under any sort of threat from a religious leader or their idea of a higher being. No matter how subtle it may seem.

Read "Myth of a Christian Nation" by Gregory Boyd

"*Christian*, in the vernacular of my evangelical subculture was an exclusive, elitist term reserved for someone who had 'prayed the prayer,' had acknowledged personal sinfulness and the need for salvation, and 'accepted Jesus into his heart.'

"*Christian* also meant a good deal more. It meant immersing oneself in the evangelical subculture, affiliating with a local church (not just any church, but a church that 'preached the Bible'), eschewing 'worldliness' in its many insidious forms, hewing to strict codes of personal morality, sending the kids off to Sunday school, youth meetings, Bible camps, and, eventually, to a Bible school or a Christian college. It meant establishing a daily "quiet time," a period of personal devotions characterized by reading the Bible, meditation, and prayer. Being a *Christian* meant witnessing, 'sharing your faith' with non-Christians – that is, anyone who did not fit this definition.
"It also meant feeling very guilty if you failed to do any of the above, or if you failed to do it with sufficient rigor or enthusiasm, for there were always spiritual athletes around to shame you – pastors, traveling evangelists, godly matriarchs in any congregation whose personal piety served both as examples worthy of emulation and implicit rebukes to your own spiritual lethargy." – Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, by Randall Balmer



This picture was sent to me by the lovely Karen Tsiakals.

28 or 24 you decide

A Retarded Guide for Riding the Normal Bus

One of the newfound experiences of my life in Seattle is riding the bus. I've ridden the bus in other cities here and there but not too often. I get on the bus about three blocks from my apartment, shuffling to work in my black hooded sweatshirt and stocking cap to help protect me from the morning chill. Most mornings it's overcast, the sun is just riding behind the mass of indistinguishable grayness. I get on the bus about 7:45 and inevitably the ride will take longer than it's supposed to. When you ride the bus at the same time every day you start to recognize the same people after a while. And in my mind, they start to get nicknames. Or you start identifying them as people who look like other people you know. There's the guy you used to work with a few jobs back and the girl you used to be internet pen-pals with for a few years. If I actually ever meet these people and become friends with them God only knows what I might say.

What I enjoy about the bus ride is the feeling of being amongst so many different folks for just that short bit of time. And inevitably you never talk to them despite your relatively close proximity. However, the opportunity is often there (especially on the ride home when people seem more open to talking), thus presenting the possibility that you could meet some amazing folks. Or you might meet annoying sociopaths. Which brings me to my next point: the crazy people who ride the bus. Many of them don't even ride the bus; they just hang out at the bus stops. Like the dude who had ripped pages out of the Bible and then had a conversation with his hand, who in turn spoke back to him. This man never got on the bus. However, I have seen homeless people get on the bus who literally smell like shit and then I watched as row after row near this woman caught her scent and evacuated further to the rear, trying to save themselves from throwing up.

Given a long enough time line the chances for an unusual encounter on the bus is almost one hundred percent. The chances for this are raised quite considerably if one rides the bus in the evening on the weekends. One of my most interesting experiences on the bus happened on a Saturday night on the way to a party. I was riding a half-empty bus downtown and it pulled up to a red stoplight. Out of my window I see a drunk midget stumbling around the corner with a tall can of beer in his hand. He walked up to the bus and pounded on the door, thinking he could get on at the corner. The bus driver told him he couldn't and to go away. The drunk didn't seem to understand this and kept trying to push on the door. Then our light turned green and we couldn't move anywhere because we had a drunk midget leaning against our bus, walking in front of it and generally being a nuisance. Finally the bus driver called the cops and they came and took the drunk to the side and he gave them this look as though he had no idea what they were doing, 'cause all he wanted to do was ride the bus for pete's sake! (Or maybe just push on the door a bunch. I don't really know.) Finally we got to go and that's the last I saw of the drunk midget. I got to the party and apologized for running a little late, offering up the ultimate excuse, "I would've been here earlier, but our bus got attacked by a drunk midget." I can't say I ever expected to

hear myself use that as an excuse for anything. And it's all thanks to riding the bus.

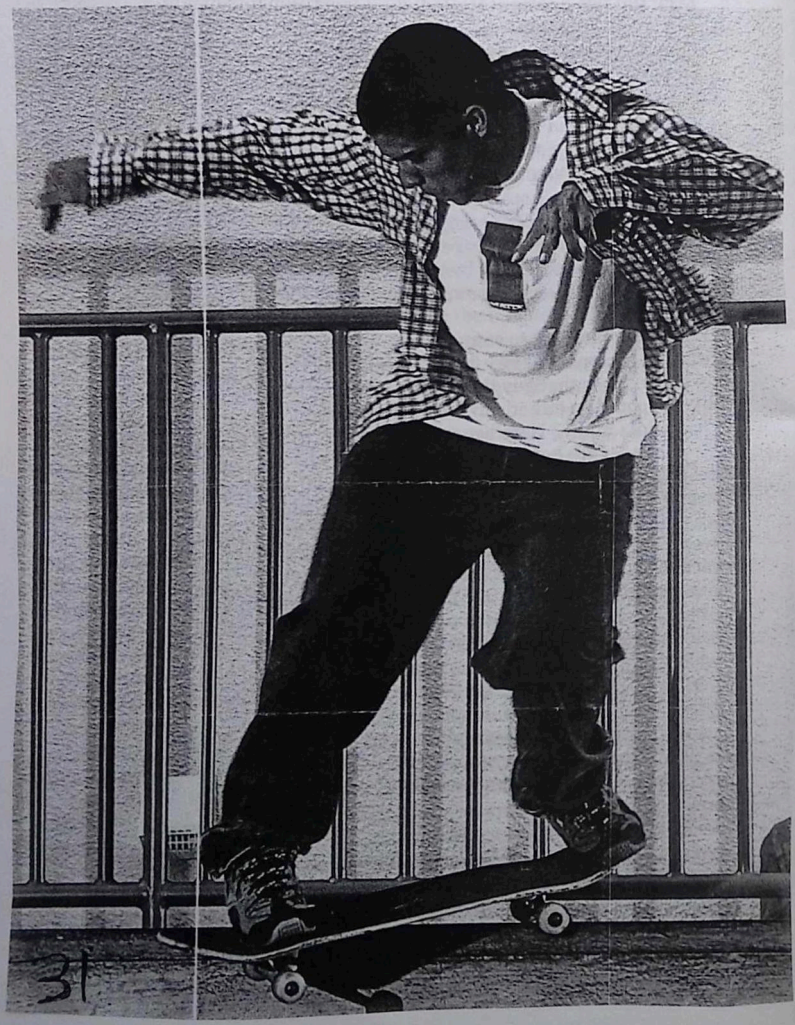
Another source of entertainment on my 30-40 minute bus ride every morning and evening is to sit in the middle of the bus. Since my bus is one of those with the accordion-like mid section (thus making it easier for it to turn) you inevitably get twisted or turned in a way that can find you at about 90 degrees difference than the back section of the bus. Not to mention the floor always seems to move up and down as it tires to keep the two halves of the bus connected. It's kind of like the equivalent of a really lame roller-coaster. The downside is that due to the lack of density of the accordion material, should a werewolf attack our bus, this would be its' best bet for getting through and thus I would most likely be one of the first to go in event of such an attack.

To pass the time on the bus ride I usually read while listening to music. I enjoy trying to catch a glimpse of what others are reading in the hopes of striking up a conversation should it be something that looks cool. I also enjoy catching the strange looks of people when they see what kind of book I'm reading. For example, the book which gave me the idea to write about work-related things for this issue, *Sabotage*, received a bug-eyed stare from one girl in my bus. She was probably kind of shocked to see I was reading a book whose subtitle is: Anecdotes of Dissatisfaction, Mischief and Revenge.

Whether I ever talk to someone about what they're reading, I NEVER want to become that guy, the one who talks the ear off of the person next to them. I saw that guy the other day on the bus, the dude who looked like he could go either way when the question was raised: homeless guy or granola hippy? Here he was, sitting next to this brunette with shoulder-length hair in her mid-twenties who seemed nice enough and he just kept talking. And talking. She made the mistake of actually paying attention to him and responding to him (albeit with short, one sentence answers). He wasn't really trying to pick her up so much as he just wanted someone to talk to. At first she had that nice friendly smile on her face. But over time it kind of deteriorated into that, "oh crap, this is really uncomfortable," look. I think people in those situations need some kind of phrase or action they can do in order to tell the rest of us people who are uninterested in those people's stories that they want out. But really what can you do? It's not like a party where you can butt in and drag the person off to another room. This is a bus and you really don't have many options. So we deal with it and hope we don't run into those people again. The invention of portable music systems have done a lot to help stem the onslaught of annoying bus neighbors. Put those headphones on and your chance of having to interact with anyone is virtually nil and most importantly, all in your own hands. Don't have a MP3 player? It doesn't matter. Just get some headphones, find a broken one at some junk/thrift shop and when you get on the bus, pretend you're jamming away. No one will know the difference and this way you'll have the opportunity to also pick up on what other might be saying about you.

The bus holds many great possibilities and potential adventures as well as some negatives (*Speed*-like hostage crises, no bathroom, drivers who think they're funny over the loudspeaker but aren't, etc.) but considering

the costs of parking some places and the traffic (better to sit in traffic and read on the bus than sit there doing nothing in your own car) as well as the great opportunities for entertainment, I'm all for riding the bus whenever you can.



The Five Remembrances of the Buddha

I can't remember the first time I read the Five Remembrances of the Buddha. However, when I did, I found them to be an incredibly instructive group of teachings that offered thoughts on how life worked that were plain and yet very insightful. Although being raised in a Christian setting, I felt as though there were few, if any teachings that so thoroughly punctuated the idea of modifications in life. Being someone who may often resent change, I felt that these thoughts regarding change as the primary theme/constant in our existence made for an insightful meditation.
What follows are the Five Remembrances as interpreted by Buddhist teacher and philosopher, Thich Naht Hahn. I include some thoughts on each as well.

1. I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.
This one doesn't seem to bother me too much at this point. I am sure a time will come when I am feeling crippled by my age and frustrated at my body not doing what I desire it to do. Much of the problem is coming to an understanding that age is a mindset and we can do great things even in our 80s and 90s. I used to think 35 was really old but now I have a roommate who is that age and he doesn't seem old at all. So, like many things in life it's a continual process. Once we come to accept this idea of age and what it entails, the better we can enjoy where we are at.

2. I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape ill health.
Thankfully this is something I have not had to deal with very much, except in regards to mental health. Physically, though, I have been quite blessed. However, this is a thorough problem in our time here on earth and one from which we cannot run. The sooner we understand that this is part of it and accept it for what it is, the better we can move along and not let it get us down. While we understand that ill health is not optimal, it doesn't mean we have to let it affect us to such a high degree as many folks make it out to be. Granted, terminal illness and perpetual health problems can be an almost altogether different matter, but I would still like to think that there can be some progress and productivity found in them, too. If not for us then at least for those around us.

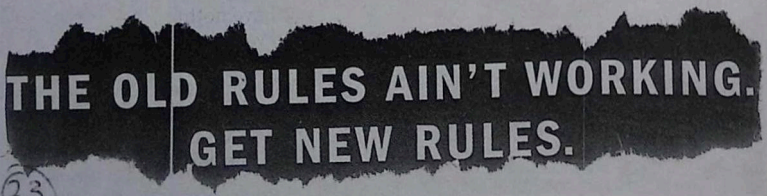
3. I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.
I'm definitely not bothered by this one. I've covered this a lot in my previous issues and suffice it to say, when it's time to go, I'll be ready.

4. All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.
This is where things start to get fairly tricky. Who the hell likes to deal with the loss of friends and family in our lives for whatever reason? People get married, go to college, get a different job, move and there's nothing we can do about it. My sister and her husband – who I both love

and enjoy being around – moved to Texas and I moved to Seattle. These are things that are frustrating to me, but I cannot escape them. This is thrown even more in a wrench when the separation involves significant others. It's hard to let people go and the love for those we are in love with is certainly different than the love we have for friends or family. I have left so many people in my life behind: girlfriends, high school friends, co-workers, roommates, etc. We are separated, they have changed or I have changed. I think back and wonder what went wrong. But the fact of it is that nothing "went wrong", we are just beings who always are in a state of flux. Nothing is constant with us for very long. And the sooner we can recognize that in ourselves and in others, the easier we will make life on ourselves and conversely for those around us.

5. My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

This is where things culminate. All of the other remembrances lead up to this one and here the resolution is provided. And what is it? Our actions are all we have. Our actions determine everything and let us know who we are. It's key to remember the second sentence, "I cannot escape the consequences of my actions." We have to face our actions, whether good or bad. There's no way to do otherwise. I remember this when I am at work, especially, and feel annoyed by something or someone. All I have are the actions I perform in response to this thing that annoys me. And that will determine how things change in response to the situation. They can be positive or negative, but it is inevitably all up to me. Of course this can lead to one being passive-aggressive if you end up not sharing your feelings in lieu of trying to perform positive actions. So it's important to have a good balance to things and make sure that even if you are trying to perform positive actions you share with others your honest feelings in regard to the issue. This last remembrance isn't an excuse to just gloss over things in order to try and make others happy. It's a reminder that we have a responsibility to stand by our actions as representation of who we are. In the midst of change, our actions are all we own. They're all that we can call our own. Strip us of everything and all we can be judged on is how we lived our lives. What were our actions? They say a lot about us and speak to what we find important. If we do not choose good actions it won't say a lot about who we are. And vice versa. Our actions serve as a foundation for who we are as people and they are the one thing we can look back upon in our life and by which we can judge ourselves.



What follows here is a brief history of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) taken from their website. I'm not a member of the IWW, but I do support the concept of unions and many of the IWW's primary beliefs. In the early 20th century they were a unique and revolutionary force in the change of the industrial workers movement, especially in such areas as steel and mining. Today they have correctly judged the new place for workers seeking good pay and benefits to be in the service industry and are working hard to unionize at such places as Starbucks and Borders. For more information on the IWW, please check out their website: www.iww.org

The IWW – Its' First 100 Years

By Harry Siitonen - Past General Secretary-Treasurer, IWW (1993); written March 2005

Frequently, when someone sees one of us wearing an IWW t-shirt or a button at a demo or picket line, the question invariably pops up: "What, are you guys still around?" Like we'd been dead and buried somewhere back in the 1920s. Or, "Oh, so the Wobblies are back!" But we're here to tell you, we never left. We're celebrating our 100th birthday this year and are organizing workers with good, recent successes. But more on that later. Let's go back to the very beginning.

Near the turn of the 20th Century, there was considerable dissension among workers over the narrow craft orientation and exclusivity of the American Federation of Labor, with the bulk of the American working class left unorganized. So in June of 1905, a gathering of about two hundred socialists, anarchists, and radical unionists from all over America held a convention in Chicago, at which the Industrial Workers of the World was organized. The theme was industrial unionism, where all workers would be organized in solidarity in One Big Union, irrespective of race, color, ethnicity or gender. Its founders included Big Bill Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners, Daniel De Leon, Eugene V. Debs, Thomas J. Hagerty, Lucy Parsons, Mary Harris Jones ("Mother Jones"), William Trautmann, Vincent Saint John, and Ralph Chaplin.

Its current Preamble has the spirit if not the letter of the original:

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth. Instead of the conservative motto, 'A

fair day's wage for a fair day's work', we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system'."

While some mistakenly consider the IWW as anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist, it's more inclusive than that, although many anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists have always belonged. It espouses revolutionary industrial unionism, and poses no ideological litmus tests, as long as one is a wage or salaried worker, and is not an employer of wage labor. The emphasis is on democratic rank and file unionism, instead of a hierarchy of union bureaucrats running the show and asking the members to merely follow, like in most business unions. Workers on the shop or office floor are encouraged to deal directly with the boss as a unit.

Since the beginning, women, immigrants, and people of color were welcomed and many have been prominent in the organizing. People like Carlo Tresca, Joe Hill, and Mary Jones were among those immigrant activists. My maternal uncle, Antti Saikkonen, came from Finland to the United States at age 16 around 1907, worked as an itinerant logger and miner and was a proud bearer of the Wobbly Red Card.

It was a militant union from the beginning and was not timid about taking on the employers. So it drew the immediate enmity of the ruling class, as a threat to the status quo. IWW members were accused of being bomb throwers and saboteurs, but generally espoused the philosophy of the "folded arms" in the withholding of their labor when the occasion called. And they were often effective in improving working conditions. What they considered "sabotage", comprised tactics of slowdowns, following rules exactly, mass sickouts---practices which are not uncommon today in workplace struggles. For the Wobblies often favored the idea of "striking on the job", rather than just striking and starving on the picket line outside the plant and watching the scabs do their work, unless there was a good chance of winning the more traditional strike.

But the bosses were relentless and these masterless rebel workers were often jailed, beaten and sometimes killed in trying to wrest some dignity from the voracious robber barons of capitalism. Free speech fights were a fight-back tactic particularly in the Western States, where IWW organizers would be arrested for soap boxing in the skid rows of large cities, trying to sign up loggers, miners and farm workers who were waiting to get hired by unscrupulous labor sharks. So the IWW contributed considerably to our civil liberties by having hundreds of members come from all over to soapbox, get arrested and pack the jails. They would sing the lusty Wobbly songs in the jails, and end up costing the cities where they were locked up so much money that they'd be released and often the free speech bans would be lifted, as in Spokane in 1909.

In 1908, there was a policy split (nothing new on the Left), which culminated at the 1908 Convention in Chicago. Daniel De Leon's

doctrinaire Socialist Labor Party group wanted to dominate the fledgling union under his autocratic dominance, and thus wanted that political action should be included in the policy. But the more radical faction, led by Saint John, Trautmann, and Haywood favored an emphasis on direct action, propaganda and strikes as the effective way forward, and opposed arbitration and political affiliation. The militants won and the De Leonists left in anger. Although Haywood himself and thousands of other Wobblies were Socialist Party members then, the IWW since then has not been affiliated with or endorsed any political party, direct action being its forte. Present policy is that you're welcome in the organization whatever your personal political or religious stance and can be active in such movements, but just leave your politics or anarchism or religion outside the IWW union hall.

ORGANIZING

The IWW first got on the map in labor struggles at Goldfield, Nevada in 1906 where for a time it ran the town as a de facto government. In 1909, the IWW won a spectacular victory in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, at the Pressed Steel Car Company which drew widespread notice. This was the same year as some of the spectacular free speech fights. Meanwhile, in Alexandria and Grabow, Louisiana, IWW poet Covington Hall was organizing lumberjacks and mill workers. Big Bill Haywood, who had been found innocent of a framed up murder charge in Salt Lake City in 1907, went down to Louisiana to lend a hand. He discovered that black and white lumberjacks were meeting separately at Alexandria. The two groups were soon integrated by the IWW and met together, something unheard of in the Deep South at the time. Interracial labor solidarity gained a tenuous foothold.

By 1912, the union had about 50,000 members, including dockworkers, and in agriculture, textiles, logging, and mining. They were involved in around 150 strikes in that period. The most famous of these was the Lawrence textile strike in Massachusetts. Since the mills employed thousands of immigrant workers of many nationalities, with limited knowledge of English, no one thought a successful strike organization possible, especially the mill bosses. But rallies were addressed by ethnic speakers of all these groups in their own languages, which was also reflected in strike literature, and an amazing solidarity was forged. This strike also involved masses of women workers who performed heroically, inspiring the beautiful labor song, "Bread and Roses". Early strike leaders Joseph J. Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti, also a noted IWW poet, were jailed. Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Tresca, and Trautmann came to fill the gap, and after great sacrifice the strike was won with considerable gain for the workers. At that time, the IWW did not believe in signed contracts and eventually the union vanished from Lawrence. The same kind of strike was prosecuted in 1913 at the Paterson, New Jersey mills, which eventually fizzled out, though hard fought.

From the late 1910s to the 1930s , the IWW's Marine Transport Industrial Union, led by an African-American dockworker Ben Fletcher, organized mainly Black longshoremen in Philadelphia and Baltimore and practically controlled the work in that industry for more than a decade. Between 1915 and 1917, the IWW Agricultural Workers Organization organized many thousands of agricultural workers throughout the Midwest and West, with many successful results. The Union was also heavily engaged in Canada.

In 1916, another major strike in the iron ore mines on the Mesabi Range had similar ethnic demographics as Lawrence, but again the formula of having organizers from every ethnic group involved made for solidarity. The Finns who a major ethnic group in the Mesabi Range mines, were a particularly militant force, and even created what became a Finnish-language IWW daily newspaper in Duluth. It was the only daily newspaper ever published in the IWW. Again, the long, bitter strike was lost, although some wage gains were made. But plenty of miners kept their Red Cards and Northern Minnesota remained a strong Wobbly stronghold.

BIG BILL OUSTED

While the IWW primarily eschewed electoral action in favor of industrial direct action as the best way to achieve the new society, thousands of Wobblies did belong to the Socialist Party. Big Bill Haywood even traveled with Gene Debs on the Red Special train during the SP's presidential campaign of 1908. He was also serving on the Party's National Committee. The Party was enjoying considerable electoral success, winning the municipal governments in a number of cities, including Milwaukee, where Victor Berger was elected to Congress on the SP ticket. Many good legislative gains were made for the people of these cities under Socialist administrations. But these gains brought about a trend to compromise on Socialist basics to attract more middle class votes, even those of small business. With the bad press of the capitalist media hounding the IWW as the agents of Satan, perpetrators of violence and sabotage, way overdone, the more reformist elements felt that the IWW elements in the SP were a liability for growing electoral success. So the radicals had to be jettisoned, for purposes of "respectability". So in 1912, Haywood was recalled from the National Committee, despite pleas by such Party luminaries as Helen Keller. His views were thus declared incompatible with Party policy. This led to a major exodus of thousands of IWW members from the SP. This became the first major schism within the Party. From my perspective, the move really hurt both the Party and the IWW badly and was a tragedy. The Party lost thousands of its most militant, courageous, class-conscious working class members for good. And the increased electoral successes for the Party did not happen in any great measure. In fact, Joseph R. Conlin in his book, "Big Bill Haywood & The Radical Union Movement", Syracuse University Press (1969), indicates that in those municipalities

in which the Wobblies were strongest, that the Party actually lost votes after the schism, instead of attracting the middle class. For the Wobblies, it proved disastrous as the baiting by the SP's reformist wing added fuel to the public fire fomented by the bosses that the IWWs were indeed the evil spawn that they portrayed. In subsequent decades an SP member presence has been re-established within the IWW, joining the anarchists, syndicalists, and other rebel workers within its ranks, but serious damage was done in those earlier times.

STATE REPRESSION

Although the IWW's tactics emphasized non-violence, the reaction by the government, bosses, and mobs of "respectable citizens" were brutally violent. In 1914, Joe Hill (Joel Hagglund), a Swedish-American itinerant worker and famous Wobbly songwriter an poet, was accused of murder on only flimsy circumstantial evidence and was executed by a firing squad in Salt Lake City in 1915. IWW organizer and General Executive Board member Frank Little was lynched by company thugs during a copper strike at Butte, Montana. At Everett, Washington, a drunken mob of deputized businessmen led by Sheriff Donald McRae, attacked Wobblies on the steamship Verona, killing five, with six lost in Puget Sound. Hundreds of Wobblies were shipped in freight cars to be marooned in the New Mexico desert by copper bosses and their vigilantes during a strike at Bisbee, Arizona.

World War I gave the Army the opportunity to crush the IWW. Although most Wobs opposed the war, the union never took an official position on it. But the government and employers fomented a lynch spirit to attack the IWW. In 1919, in Centralia, Washington, vigilantes attacked the IWW hall, and when IWW member and returning war veteran Wesley Everest shot back, he was killed by the mob. In September, 1917, the Feds made simultaneous raids on 48 IWW halls around the country. 166 IWW activists were arrested for conspiring to hinder the draft, encourage desertion, and intimidate others under the new Espionage Act. 161 went on trial before Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis in 1918 and all were found guilty. Some had not even been members for many years. While on bail, Big Bill Haywood fled to the Soviet Union where he died in 1928, a lonely and broken man. Communist Party promises to reimburse the bail money for Haywood and others were never fulfilled.

Even after the war, the repression continued. IWWs were persecuted and harassed under state and federal laws. A number of Wobblies were sentenced to lengthy prison terms under the so-called criminal-syndicalist laws. These included Fred Thompson, a popular Chicago Wobbly writer, editor, organizer, educator and historian, who joined the SP in his later years, as well as his lifetime in the IWW, until his death in 1987. Many foreign-born Wobblies and other radicals were deported under the Palmer Raids.

POST-WORLD WAR I

Another major hit hurt the IWW as a consequence of the Russian Revolution. Considerable numbers of members were lost to the Communists in the heady days of promise in its aftermath. Although the Union at first was sympathetic, soon reality hit. The Red Labor International in Moscow urged Wobblies and other radicals to join the AFL and other "yellow unions" and "bore from within". Those kinds of tactics were distasteful to the IWW and something an honest rebel could not countenance. Then Moscow wanted to name who could be on the IWW General Executive Board. This went totally counter to the IWW's principle of union democracy; its rank and file members elect the GEB, no one else. So with the increasing top-down dictatorial rule developing in the Soviet Union, the IWW became an opponent.

Still, despite all its adversities the IWW continued to organize. In 1923, its membership was at its historic highest of some 100,000 members. Then the disaster of "splititis" struck again in 1924. A bitter division developed between the "Easterners" and the "Westerners" over a number of issues. Chief among them was the role of the General Administration, simplified as a fight between "centralists" and "decentralists". This battle played holy havoc for several years before it subsided. However, by 1930, the membership had shrunk to around 10,000. It was still able, however, to conduct a successful state-wide mining strike in Colorado in the late 1920s, but again, despite gains for the workers, the organization was unable to stabilize its presence and disappeared mostly from the scene.

But the IWW never gave up fighting and during the 1930s organized a number of stove factories in Cleveland with which it signed contracts and represented until the 1950s. Of course, all this time, Wobblies took part in the CIO organizing drives of the 1930s. Many were "two-carders". They held membership in whatever union existed on their job, but also kept up their IWW dues., and always maintained the principles of union democracy and rank and file militancy wherever they worked. (For instance, the author is a "three-carder". He is a retiree member of 48 years standing in the International Typographical Union, later the Printing Sector of the CWA, a 15-year active member of the Screen Actors Guild, as well as almost 36 years in the One Big Union.). With the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act in 1959 and its anti-communist affidavits to rid unions of leftist leaders, the IWW lost the Cleveland metal shops. As a point of principle, the IWW, along with the Typographical Union and United Mine Workers, refused to sign such loyalty oaths, so the Cleveland shops left the Union and affiliated with a more compliant one. This was a major loss for the IWW.

The IWW was at a lowest ebb in membership as the Sixties approached, but the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war activity and university student movements brought new life to the Union. Small scale organizing drives

resumed and successes were attained in printing collectives, coffee shops and art movie houses. In the 1980s the IWW were successful in organizing a large non-profit book store and warehouse operation in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and gained a voice in its management. But a few years later the top managerial bureaucracy sold out to a for-profit operation elsewhere and the Ann Arbor workplaces were closed. From the 1990s on the Union achieved good successes in organizing shops. In Berkeley, California, the Union has succeeded in organizing three workplaces which are now under contract. These include two recycling plants and a fabric store with almost all women employees. Ecology Center trucks picking up household recycling goods all over the city are operated by IWW members. Portland, Oregon has organized numerous non-profits and shops in various industries, operates the Red and Black restaurant collective and a couple of years ago at the city's May Day parade, 300 people marched under the IWW's banner. In the Stockton, California area close to 250 independent truckers, mostly East Indian, but including Filipinos, African-Americans and Mexicans joined the IWW in 2004 and have won some important disputes, particularly in the payment for excess wait time and reinstatement of firings. Since these truckers are "independent contractors" they are not recognized as a labor union under Federal labor law, but it's surprising what can be done on an informal basis as long as strong solidarity is practiced.

Other labor struggles the Union has participated in was Redwood Summer and the picketing of the Neptune Jade in the Port of Oakland in late 1997, for which the IWW earned positive recognition from the maritime unions, in which some of our members are two-carders. In recent years, the union has set up organizer training programs both in the US and Canada in many localities. Our brilliant young woman General Secretary-Treasurer Alexis Buss has played a vital role in organizing these trainings. With the difficulty of going to NLRB route for recognition in the hostile anti-labor climate of late-stage neo-liberal capitalism, the IWW has brought the concept of "minority unionism" to the fore. Never mind playing around with the obstructive government restrictions on recognition. It's possible to sign up workers in the Union, and operate informally at a workplace in solidarity direct actions to defend and advance workers rights in increasingly sweatshop conditions. Here GST Buss and veteran labor activist Staughton Lynd have conducted workshops around the country on minority unionism. This really harks back to the early days of IWW organizing when loggers would have stop-work meetings to demand lice-free mattresses in the bunkhouses and decent grub at the evening meal, and often win. Being the Industrial Workers of the World, the organization is not only confined to the USA, but has active branches and sections in Canada, Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

This is the page of forty.

IWW AND WORKER CULTURE

We would be remiss if the importance of the popular culture of the IWW wasn't included in this article. The entire labor movement has enjoyed the impact of IWW songs, poetry, skits, music, art (particularly cartoon and poster art), and irreverent satire, even at its own expense. Being the free-spirited, anti-authoritarian kind of folks the Wobblies are, the juices of their cultural creativity know no parallel in the labor movement. "Solidarity Forever", written by early Wobbly Ralph Chaplin, has become the virtual national anthem of the entire labor movement. Joe Hill is celebrated for both his irreverent, colorful songs and poems as much as for his martyrdom. T-Bone Slim (the itinerant Finnish-American worker from Ashtabula, Ohio, Matt Valentine Huhta) wrote many great songs, including "The Popular Wobbly", and as a writer for the Industrial Worker, was known for his great humor and surreal twists on the English language. Poets included Covington Hall, Ralph Chaplin, Arturo Giovannitti, and Matilda Rabinowitz (later, Matilda Robbins who I met in Los Angeles in the 1950s where she was a good friend of the SP). She was also one of the great early woman organizers of the Union. The IWW Little Red Songbook is still in print and continues to be a best-seller at every public gathering where an IWW literature table is present,. Dozens of performing artists sing old and new Wobbly songs. If you ever have a chance to go hear a Utah Phillips concert go hear him or buy one of his CDs. This veteran IWW sourdough knows all the old faves, and is a great story-telling raconteur to boot.

THE FUTURE

We've been here for a century now, and raring to go on and organize workers for the next 100. The world is in huge trouble, however, for its working masses and the earth's very survival with the madcap cancerous rampage of an insatiable, carnivorous capitalism. The working class, despite all, remains the best hope to challenge it. All the so-called "mainstream" unions in this country are shrinking rapidly and represent 13% of US workers at present. Animated, even panicky, discussion is going on right now for the restructuring of the AFL-CIO, but most proposals are for top-down hierarchical approaches, staying within the parameters of business unionism, supporting the Democrats with even more money, and not challenging the very existence of capitalism as a class movement. Certainly, the core ideas expressed in the IWW Preamble are more relevant than ever. The IWW will be in the middle of all this dialogue, calling for a class-conscious, rank-and-file controlled democratic labor movement, empowering women, people of color, and sexual and other minorities within the working class to be fully participatory components within it. And above all, working to end the great scourge of capitalism. At the Seattle anti-WTO globalist demonstrations in 1999, the IWW contingent carried a banner, reading: "Capitalism Cannot Be Reformed". Amen!

John walked out the door of the bar, the air had a certain chill and he started to make his way past the businesses and houses and down the street to his house. The grass is starting to get frost on it he noticed, while wishing he had some gloves. He popped headphones in his ears and the music started to deafen him. The more distance between him and the bar, the more he thought about the situation and the more frustrated and angry he got. Without thinking, he suddenly found himself smashing his left hand into a mailbox, letting off a loud thud while denting the aluminum tube. Drawing back his hand he sees it's blotchy red and felt it throbbing already. It's not cut however. Surging with the adrenaline he felt a little better and proceeded to smash the next box, a plastic one, with his right hand. This box doesn't give the same way the aluminum one did and only made his hand blotchy as well. With two throbbing hands he proceeded to take on most stationary objects he found, outright pummeling some of them (flowers, lawn ornaments) or holding his own (mailboxes, bigger lawn ornaments) but finally met his match with a large oak tree. Pulling away his left hand he noticed a crimson spot on the tree to see that his hand was covered in blood and one of his fingers was not in its right spot. Gingerly he popped it back in place with his right hand. For good measure (and due to his slightly inebriated state) he smashed the right one against the tree and came off reeling. Blood dripped down his hands on onto the sidewalk. The swath of minor destruction would be a strange sight to whoever came across it in the morning, especially with its bloody culmination at the oak tree. Finally making it home, John entered with no attempt made to keep his blood off everything he touched. When he got into their bedroom June was lying in bed unable to sleep. He collapsed in bed with a slight thud and stared at the ceiling, blood finally starting to dry on his knuckles and fingers but still with the capability to leave its' mark on newly cleaned sheets. Unaware of things beyond his bloodied hands and drunken demeanor he soon fell asleep, not realizing that June, too, had been staring at the same ceiling as him, only inches apart, no words shared between the two of them.

The next morning both of them headed to work, first June, then John. June noticed the blood on the sheets and John's hands and muffled her loud gasp with her hands as she got closer to inspect the situation, all the while trying not to wake John from his slumber. She slightly touched John's right hand and started to cry, but wiped away the tears and finished her morning routine.

She made one last check of herself in the mirror before heading out the door in order to make sure her eyes weren't all red or any makeup had been smeared. Seeing everything is okay, she took a deep breath and headed out the door. John's emergence from a night's sleep found him groggy and slightly confused. Why were his hands covered in blood? And then it hit him and with the throbbing comes the remembrance of his epic but ultimately futile bout with a tree. He cleaned up the best he could with his bruised hands and got around for work.

It was a Wednesday. Normally that meant John spent the evening locked in the basement of his house in his studio after work, but by the end of his shift at the coffeeshop his hands were killing him, not to mention how embarrassed he was when serving customers at work. He kept ice on them whenever the traffic slowed down.
He arrived home and downed four ibuprofen with a glass of water. No one else seemed to be around. The idea of having a child had sunk in a little more easily for John to handle the more he thought about it. He was still severely worried about this potential for such a huge undertaking. Things seemed so upside down and inside out. He was going to be a father? He was barely 24 and could hardly take care of his own life. It took a lot of energy and time on his part just to make his relationship with June work. Ideas that were once important to him would have to take a back seat to this child. He felt as though he was losing his mind. His sliced up hands were proof that this might well be the case. Never a model of stability he now felt as though his mind was racing in response to all the possibilities.
John's response to not wanting children wasn't a new thing. Ever since high school he had found himself going against the grain on many ideas and philosophies. He was reading about existentialism before most people even learned anything about philosophy 101. Thus it wasn't that odd for him to realize his disinterest in having children. The reasons grew and refined themselves over the years, but his disinterest in becoming a father never seemed to change despite many conversations wherein people tried to convince him that he would change his mind.

June walked in to the house and found her boyfriend sitting on the couch, staring at a blank TV.
"Hi honey," she said, softly. He kept staring at nothing oblivious to her presence. "Everything, ok?" she asked.
"What? Yeah, fine. Everything's fine," he replied, breaking his trance-like state and looking over at her. "What's up? Where were you?"
"At my parents."
"Yeah? How are they?"
"Good. They're good. Listen John," she started before pausing, "I told my folks about the baby. And—"
"What?! You told them? Dammit June, why?"
"They want to help us," she said in a calm voice that seemed to undercut John's sudden anger. "They say they'll be supportive of whatever we decide but in the end they would really like us to have it."
"Ah! I can't win, can I? Did you go to your parents just to gang up on me? What the hell?" Johns said astonished. By this point, he'd arisen from his seat and was pacing around the living room.
Firmly June strikes back, "No, I did it because I needed to have someone support me with this child! You evidently aren't interested." The strong response from the normally quiet June took John down a notch. John sighed and tried to tone his voice down a notch.
"June, honey, I don't want to have a child. Give it up for adoption, get an abortion, whatever – I just don't want to be responsible for it."
"Fine! You don't have to be. I'll raise it by myself."

"And how are you going to do that June? You don't make enough money," and trying to assert himself back into the situation he quickly added, "We don't make enough money."
"I told you my parents will help. God John, why are you so against some responsibility?"
"We've had this conversation before. I want to live life some. Besides, I'd be a horrible father. I'm not responsible and can barely get my shit together." Holding up his shredded hands to her he said, "In the face of responsibility instead of being happy I chose to get drunk and attack mailboxes and a tree. What does that say about me?"
"Wait, was that you that trashed all those mailboxes just down the street?" she asked while pointing in the direction of the mayhem.
"Yes," he replied sheepishly somewhat taken aback at his actions.
"Why?" June asked, astonished.
"I don't know June," he whined. "I was drunk and pissed off and something about the music on my headphones and my feelings in regards to everything that just happened made me feel like destroying stuff. And then I reached that tree and—"
"You punched a tree? Is that what caused you to bleed all over the bed?" There was an angsty tone in her voice.
"I guess."
"You guess? Dammit John..." June couldn't seem to find the words to finish her sentence. She took her turn sitting on the couch and put her head in her hands. They stayed in their spots for a while, June sitting and John standing, completely quiet.
John broke the silence after a minute, "I'm going to take a shower."

In the shower John thought about the past few conversations between him and June. He knew she wanted to be a mother someday and that raising kids was something that meant a great deal to her. She came from a solid, stale family and had nice parents who didn't necessarily worship John but still, they treated him well. June's siblings were all nice and being older than her already had their own families. She had nothing but good models of families laid out before her.
John's family on the other hand, was split up. His parents divorced when he was 10, he and his younger sister constantly being shuffled between his mom and her myriad of boyfriends and his alcoholic father whose rollercoaster battle with the bottle always made life way more interesting than it should be for a teenager. His sister, two years younger than him had already been married and divorced by 22 and produced two kids in the process. How John had gotten out of what seemed to be a familial rut and put himself through art school had more to do with supportive high school teachers than anything else. His ability to escape his hometown and not be married at his age were minor victories of which he was fairly proud. Perhaps someday he would get married but he knew deep down inside that he didn't ever want to have kids.
He wanted to work on art, listen to music, hang out with friends, have fun and drink a lot – not change diapers and feed a baby. And while a part of him understood why June wanted to have kids, he just couldn't get past the cold, clammy fear that built inside him whenever he thought

about it too much. He could never get past the fear of responsibility that seemed overwhelming in its nature. Most of that had followed him his whole life and led to him being incredibly neurotic and depressed. A scattering of counselors and medicines only helped slightly. He found that despite its repercussions the negative feelings definitely inspired his art. And ironically, whenever he had to rise and meet the responsibility with his art in school, he always seemed to excel to the challenge and do well. His pieces seemed to win a fair share of awards, so art wasn't usually a major stressor.

It was almost always the responsibility of "adult life" that got to him. And sometimes he did okay with things, other times not. He didn't know what to do with this situation. Every part of his body told him to not have anything to do with it, but at the same time he felt a deep-seated sense of responsibility towards June, whom he really did love and the predicament which they had mutually found themselves. John's mind wondered and suddenly he realized the cold water of the shower.

Upon finishing he found himself feeling somewhat departed from the fear of his situation and looking at things clearly for what seemed like the first time. What to do? What to do? This question kept ruminating in his mind. Responsibility versus fear.

A few days passed and June and John hardly spoke. The relations in the house had turned cold but not yet icy. Finally after a week or so John had come to a conclusion in his mind as to what he should do in regards to his situation. That night he came home to find June sitting at their desk in the house, typing away on the laptop.

"Hey June," he said softly, with a bit of hope in his voice.

"Hi," she responded, not looking up from her laptop.

"How are you doing?" he asked. His voice actually showed some warmth for once. It was the first time he had tried being courteous and loving towards her all week.

"Mmm, I'm ok," she said, still not looking up from her computer.

"What are you up to?"

"Oh, just answering some emails."

"Who are you writing?" he said in a friendly way, trying to make sure not to sound as though he was prying but still trying to show an interest.

"Just my mom. I know she lives here in town but sometimes we like to drop little notes to each other throughout the week."

"That's nice. I guess you had mentioned that sometimes she wrote you. That's cool. I'm glad your parents care about you that much," he said, his act starting to wear thin.

June stopped typing and turned to him. "Okay John, what's up?" Damn, his ruse was up.

"Well, I've been thinking about this baby thing a lot this past week."

"And?"

"June, I don't know. I can't force you to have an abortion. I know you want the baby. And I know that I love you and don't want to leave you. But having a baby scares the shit out of me. I'm just not ready for that kind of responsibility."

"Oh John, I know you'd be a great dad. You do quite alright for yourself and seem very responsible to me. You get up each day for work and

spend time each week working on your art and that's more than a lot of people could do," she said as she reached out and placed her hand on his forearm.
"I know, I know. And I know that even though I'd really like you to give the baby up for adoption you're not going to do that. I can understand that even though I don't think it's the most financially sound decision. But I can't change your mind on this; I know that now. So my options as I see it are two things: we can stay together and have this baby and raise it, probably with a lot of help from your parents, or I can leave you and not take part in raising it and just pay child support or whatever for the next twenty years. Would you agree with that?" he asked as he looked her in the eyes.
"Well, I'm not sure I would put it like that, but I guess that's about right," June responded as she looked down at the ground.
"So I guess I'm trying to say that I want to go through with this because I know it's not only what's best for me, but also for you and the baby."
"Wow," June replied, somewhat shocked. "I'm surprised to hear you say all that, but it makes me glad too."
"Well, I had just been thinking and I realized what my options were and things weren't going to change so I knew what I had to do. I've got to accept the situation for what it is and move on with my life – with our lives."
John looked at June with sincerity in his eyes and she had been with him long enough to know this is what he really meant and that he was going to follow through. Relieved, she hugged John and felt a huge sense of relief.

Over the course of the next few months, June proceeded to show more and more and together John and June visited the doctor and made all the necessary arrangements for the birth. Le Mans class, ultrasound, lots of brochures and information was sorted through. They decided on not knowing what the sex was until the actual birth; the couple looked forward to the surprise. June and John ended up moving in to a one bedroom apartment in a part of town not quite the ghetto but not far from it, either.
Finally, the time came near and June found herself waking up one morning in pain and knew that it was time. She woke John and together they successfully made it to the hospital. John called June's parents and soon thereafter they arrived, and after many hours of labor so did their grandchild, a girl who was quite healthy. Everyone was quite happy with how things went – June, the doctor, John – and despite being quite tired, it seemed that June, especially was in good spirits. After all the necessary tests the baby rested at the hospital and the doctor told June that she and the baby could go home the next day.
Unfortunately, somewhere in the middle of the night June came down with an infection of some sort. John was at home trying to get a few hours of sleep but was woken up in the middle of the night with word from the hospital that something was wrong with June. He rushed there to find June suffering from the effects of some sort of viral infection; somehow something had gone wrong in the birthing procedure. The

doctor informed John that they were trying to treat the infection with some very powerful antibiotics, but it didn't look too promising at this point; things had just happened too quickly. The doctor told John that he hadn't ever heard or seen of a case this bad, which did little to reassure John.
John entered the hospital room and saw June lying there, somewhat out of it. She had been in and out of consciousness, but the doctor informed him that she was awake now and didn't know for how much longer she would be so.
"June?" John said softly while closing the door. "You awake?" A rustling in the bed and the slow emergence of June's eyes told John she was indeed awake. "How are you doing?" he asked while pulling up a chair next to her bed. She was far from coherent and mumbled a "I've been better" back to him. He squeezed her hand and told her how much he loved her. She returned his affections and questioned about the child.
"She's doing ok," John said. "She's pretty healthy and the doctor says she'll be fine."
"Good," June replied with a weak voice. "I'm glad you're here. And I'm glad you changed your mind with everything. It means a lot to me," she added with a smile as she reached out her hand for John's. He squeezed her hand and smiled back at her. "So am I," he said. "No matter what happens June, I'll do my part to take care of our daughter. You just get some rest for now and know that I love you."
"I love you too, John," she replied, slowly drifting back to a state of unconsciousness.
June's condition continued to degrade over the course of the day and despite the pleas of both John and June's parents, the doctors could do nothing to save her.

And like that – the thing he loved the most in the world was taken from him. John broke down and sat in the chair in June's hospital room. This couldn't really be happening. It didn't seem possible. Everything seemed to be going fairly well. They were even talking about getting married sometime in the near future. And now what? John got up and went over to June's bed and looked at her. Evidently, inside of her, her organs had been ravaged. But to him, she looked as though she was sleeping. How could this have happened?
"And what about the baby? Oh God, what now?" He thought to himself sitting there. Suddenly he felt a tracer of fear run down his spine, his pulse quickened and he started to sweat. The old feelings of chaos and panic swept over him as he looked at the dead body of the mother of his child. He kicked the chair as hard as he could and broke the leg of it. Terrified at the consequences of June's passing he quickly took her cold, clammy hand and squeezed it, kissed her on the forehead, grabbed his satchel bag and left the room.
June's parents were, like John, devastated by the death of their daughter. They, too, saw her in the hospital room, soon after John left, unaware that he had been there until they talked to the nurse a little later. They mourned the loss of their child and as hard as it was they made the proper arrangements with the hospital and a local funeral home.

However, when it came to questions about the future of the baby girl, John couldn't be found. They called the apartment, his mom's place back in his hometown. No one had seen him. June's parents took the child home with them and after trying for a week or so to find the father, the appropriate legal actions were taken to make June's parents (now in their 50s) the legal guardian of the child. John's disappearance angered both of June's parents a great deal but it especially infuriated June's father and he had a terrible time with his temper in the first few months after John's disappearance. John, on the other hand, found himself in total fear of June's parents, his newly birthed child, his living situation – the whole thing.

The next chance he got he cleaned out his checking account and took the funds and bought a one-way plane ticket to Europe. During the long flight he sat next to a nice, older woman who was flying back to Paris from a work excursion in the States. She was older, perhaps in her 40s but quickly struck up a conversation with John.

"You look very tired," she said with her French accent. "If you want to sleep, I can shut off my light above," she added, motioning to the overhead light she was using to read a French periodical.

"Oh, no, that's ok," John muttered. "I can't sleep," he added, running his hand through his hair.

"Is something the matter?" the French woman asked rather boldly. And thus opened the flood doors of the past year of John's life. The whole time the French woman – whose name, John came to learn, was Isabel – listened intently, showing genuine care and interest in his story. Finally, at the end she asked him, "What are you planning on doing in Paris?" to which he answered, "I have no idea." And then rather matter-of-factly she said, "You may come live with my husband and me until you can figure out what you want to do."

"Oh no, that's okay. I appreciate it but I can't intrude like that. Besides, you barely know me."

"It does not matter. You seem like a person in need of some help and direction and you are an artist, no? My husband and I love the arts and it will be a pleasure to help along an artist. Besides, we frequently entertain friends and family for long periods of time. It will not be so awkward for us."

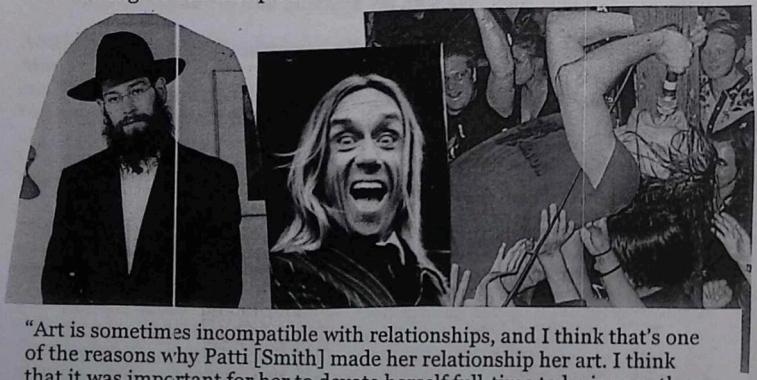
"Um, wow," was all John could mutter. Suddenly he wondered, "is this some kind of joke? Is this lady going to kill me? Is she even who she says she is?" She appeared legitimate to John so he went on a limb and accepted and less than 12 hours later he found himself in a wonderfully elegant house in an upper middle class neighborhood in Paris. He met Jean-Pierre, Isabel's husband and realized that it appeared that for all intensive purposes, this was a legitimate deal. Over the course of a few days he began to feel more relieved and relaxed. And over time, things started to work themselves out; he found his own place, a part time job and got himself an opportunity to study with a local artist, one with whom he was familiar and thus respected the break.

Yet he still found himself occasionally thinking of his child – his daughter – and wondering what happened to her or where she was. Over time he did his best to just try and write her out of his mind.

The Outcasts of This World

We are the outcasts of this world; we'll never be normal, we'll never fit in. We'll never be what other people want us to be and those we once called "friend" will never look our way again. We thought we were interested in sharing things together but I guess those things can change. Everyone is filling in their roles as assigned by some director they've never met, with very few stopping to ask "why?" No aberration in regards to their behavior is needed. They're on the way to ruining lives unbeknownst to them. This isn't a moral struggle or a battle of the conscious; this is breeding, plain and simple. For selfish reasons: I want this, I want that; this will help *me*.

I respect those who have the piece of mind to look at you with a disgusted/puzzled look on their face when you mention an interest in settling down, having children, getting a "normal" job and the like. There's no behavior that's not an aberration to someone, somewhere, but there seems to be a handful of us who are willing to stick our necks out there and call out those whose lifestyle we find not only puzzling, but occasionally abhorrent. If you want to live that life, there is ultimately nothing I can do to stop you, but I won't give in to that and I won't go through with a normal life and therein bring another being in to this world. Who knows what might come? And I may get married, but I will be single to the day I die. As all of us misfits will be. We relish in it and we keep ourselves going that way. It's a challenge and a force and something we can take pleasure in.

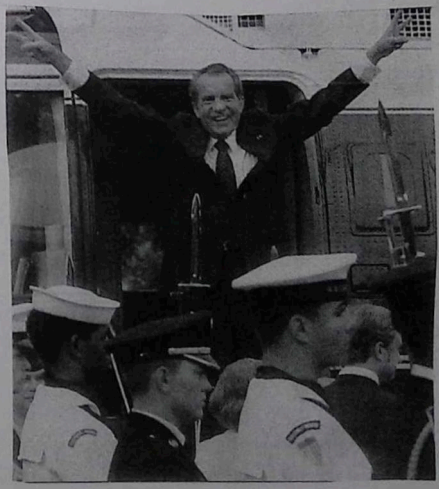


"Art is sometimes incompatible with relationships, and I think that's one of the reasons why Patti [Smith] made her relationship her art. I think that it was important for her to devote herself full-time to loving another person, because when you're making art, there's a certain selfishness involved. I sometimes think that musicians or artists shouldn't even think about having a permanent relationship until they're in their late thirties, because until then their relationship will always take second place to their art. Artists don't make the best in-laws." – Lenny Kaye (The Patti Smith Group), *Please Kill Me*, pg. 371.

I went here for Thanksgiving last year.

Orlando ←

We travel for perspective.
We leave our homes
to understand
how good we have it
or how much we need to change.
Such a tired subsistence
on nothing but throngs of foreign visitors
and foreign exchanges.
A dilapidated, sorrowful empty dream
Devoid of any culture and rich life.
It's kind of like Las Vegas –
Just walk away.
Take me to St. Augustine
or the sweltering streets of Miami.
Not a skinny, sheltered vision –
a dry tree with its' roots only six inches deep.
Everything here can be put down
and left at a whim.
And so I think I shall.
We've spent too much of our lives
being influenced by a place like this.
"Why do we raise the dead
with every argument?
I'm not that brave today.
What's true? I thought I knew."



50.
End.